

[[Talvieno's note: I'm going to try to record everything that's happened in a clear format. I'm also going to try to put everything in order canon-wise, that way you won't have to backtrack and figure things out for yourself later on. Hopefully, this'll make your experience better.]]

[[Talvieno's note: All my notes will have double brackets around them, like so. They may pop up anywhere, so watch for them. If they aren't labeled "Talvieno's note:", then it isn't actually one of my notes.]]

[[Talvieno's note: The following legend will help you understand which sections are OOC chat, Overseer entries, and side stories.

URIST MCPOSTER: This is an overseer entry.

URIST MCPOSTER: This is a side journal or story post.

(Urist McPoster): This is an OOC chat post. Expect them in clumps.

That should explain things pretty well. And now, welcome to Spearbreakers: The madness, the mayhem, and the mugs.]]

PROLOGUE

[[Talvieno's note: Written by Splint, edited by me. Not posted in the main thread, but official nonetheless. It was also listed as "unfinished". A special treat for those of you who download this doc.]]

Six dwarves sit in a small room at a dining table, conversing among themselves. They'd been called by their friend, Splint. He had been assigned to build a new military and border control center, and as such he had asked his friend to help him. They were here to talk specifics, but splint had yet to see them.

"I'll betcha he's havin' secon' thoughts." Sus, one of the two miners mused. "He ne'er was one ta be confident."

Sus turned to The Master, who was rehashing old war stories to one of the others. He was starting to get annoying about it; Sus respected the soldiers plenty, but the more enthusiastic killers always worried him. "...And I never heard goblin bitch so much over a little stabbing to the chest as this one! There was hardly any carnage at all!!! So I told him: 'Hey, come on man, I killed elves who didn't complain as much about getting stabbed as you!'"

"Priceless," Talvi nodded with a chuckle.

As the groups little chats continued, the door swung open.

Splint came into the place, a cat-leather bound journal in hand and a small box with other similar ones, though made of different materials. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I'll be straight forward. We're going to a very dark place."

The Master piped up, "We kinda figured that when you asked me and Draig to come along. Lifted my spirits - I love carnage. And we're pikedwarves after all."

"Exactly," Splint said. "We've been tasked to build a fortress on the borderlands of the terror zones."

Sus spat his ale at the mention of those dark places. "We're WHA'?!?"

Splint set the box of journals on the table, and took several out. "Here, pass these around. The journals may help us stay sane. And you heard me, Sus. You've already invested all your savings so we can't back out now; I've already loaded up the wagon."

Talvi lowered her mug, slightly disheartened.

Splint continued. "Now we've all heard the old tales of the wars and nightmares on the continent of Everoc, Boatmurdered, Syrupleaf, Swordthunders, Headshoots, and many others. This is not what I want happening here, to our capital and as such we need to set up a means of at least lessening the tide of horrors that come for our beloved mountainhall. it is no random twist of fate we're doing this. We were born for this mission, and we will see it out, for better or worse." The Master and Draigneau cheered for Splint, while the other were either incredibly nervous or indifferent. "Now grab whatever you've got and finish your drinks. We leave in fifteen."

The group grumbled, save for the two pikedwarves, who seemed eager to return to the frontlines once more. "Never thought I'd get to fight the Parasol messes! Plenty of CARNAGE!!!" The Master roared happily. He was a true Armydwarf, in and out. "Think we'll get some nice shiny new pikes? I've been wanting one for a while... For reasons of my own."

"Doubt it. I just bought an old copper one for defenses early on. I never saved a lot from the vampiric wars."

"Ah, neither did I. But I still had the money for this fancy mail vest!" The Master thumped his vest, the mail clinking lightly at the impact.

"Oh shut up. A copper pike is better than a training one," Splint said.

"Well.... It *will* make more carnage - I'll give you that."

SPLINT (OOC):

Welcome to Spearbreakers! The hopeful epic for DF2012! WARNING: TEXT BLOCKS TO FOLLOW.

With a combination of modding and decent involvement on the part of overseers and the community at large, I hope to forge the first epic of the new version, to hopefully be surpassed in insanity by greater tales for the new version spawned from this. I encourage everyone to get involved in some way! Stories, doodles, insane rambling and speculation, come on board for the awaiting insanity! Hell, we managed to start a timewar before one overseer got his first proper update up.

There are a number of overseers already lined up, so that a stable base is in place for more to join on. Credits to the Spearbreakers modding team: Mr Frog (mystery race, testing,) Myself (Splint; Mountain Barbarians, testing) and Talvieno (Very involved in testing and idea contribution) for most of what was done, and Hugo_The_Dwarf for providing the stone warhammer and anvil casting reactions.

Before anything, I'll list specifically what was done.

-No Grazers: Dwarves have a *VERY* bad habit of trying to bring animals in over staying alive when ambushes strike, so to circumvent this there are no grazers so the things can be stored underground for use in textiles/meat industries as needed.

-No Exotics: For obvious reasons. Can't wait for a possibly broke noble. Giant

varieties are also trainable (mostly.)

-No Aquifer: Depending on the play style, this may actually hurt or help. This was done so Stone would be readily available for exporting mugs.

-Stonehammers: Stone war hammers intended for emergency military use by civvies called up in a hurry. Pitchblende should be imported for this purpose only, as hammers of the stuff in unskilled hands can shatter bones on the first swing (This was in fortress mode testing too mind.)

-Pikes and other weapons: These are a personal favorite flavor weapon and part of the fortress challenge, to be explained later. Also made available as authority (squad leader) weapons are the Morningstar and Longsword.

-More drinks: As they go otherwise unused, dye/other plants are now brewable into the following:

- *Dwarven Brandy: Made from dimple cups

- *Emerald Whiskey: Made from Blade Weed

- *Redroot Ale: Made from Hide root

- *Golden Blaze: Surpasses even sunshine in value, made from valley herbs.

- *Kobold Brew: made from Kobold bulb. Gnomeblight is all well and good, but dwarves can't drink it.

-No good/evil plants: Mostly so the Fortress guard will have their beating potential reduced should they be given featherwood crossbows, but to also increase available booze/food crops.

-Subterranean Plant Depths changed: Just to make the caverns a touch more confusing and make a wider variety of cavernwood available.

-Two new races: one deadly and won't be revealed until they surprise an overseer. They'll be the great surprise of the game. To those who know, keep them lips sealed! The other, the Mountain barbarians, invaders from the far off land of the old tales, Everoc. These quasi-humans have become warped by evil magic permeating that place. They are slavers and naturally skilled in unarmed combat. However a well armed and skilled militiadwarf should have no trouble killing even a small grouping of them.

-Upped embark points: Due to the increase in migrant wave size, the extra food seeds and whatnot were a must. 3200 total. Represents the funds the starters sunk into the embarkation.

-Deer and Emu as domestics: Emu for their modded increase in clutch size, deer for their hoof materials and hides.

And now, Challenges!

-A regimented professional army: For largely narrative and experimental purposes. The goal is to make a large (Preferably disproportionately large) army to take a stand against the invaders from Everoc, and see how long it takes for such an army to be run over multiple overseers to fall into disarray. Organization as follows:

**Pikedwarves/Speardwarves:* Preferably Pikes (Note training pikes of good quality make a good trading commodity, just a heads up.) Partially as part of the name, these dwarves make up the mainstay of Spearbreakers' Armed forces. They are the backbone of the fort. Two NPCs by the names of Fischer and Stova will be the initial head of the Army. This was due to not wanting to gender bender Draigneane and The Master, the intended commanders.

**Shocktroopers:* None-polearm soldiers play roles as specialists (Axe and hammerdwarves to dismember and disable bronze colossi for example, if any have made it through worldgen.) This also can be a narrative device, as the soldiers form rivalries between the Spearbreakers regts and specialists. Will it escalate to violence? Only time will tell. Marksddwarves fall into Support specialists, as the unnamed race will scarcely succumb to even masterwork bolts, so they at best may slow them down. Melee combat will probably be the only real effective (and potentially very costly) elimination method.

**Miner Auxilia:* Time to call up the glass cannons! Only send them in if you REALLY need to.

**Conscript onslaught:* Why the rockhammers were added. This likely means the place is in its death throws as the professional troops are all dead. Try to avoid this if at all possible. Reclaim is NOT the intended goal and won't be undertaken unless the place goes down in a suitably spectacular way, such as pulling a Swordthunders.

-No weaponized magma: This is a challenge and preventative measure, as the unnamed race takes a VERY long time to melt. This wasn't intended but it makes melting everything rather.... problematic. And in that time you have walking columns of smoky rage to deal with. Other uses are fine however.

-Let the buggers live: I reduced the age at which dwarves are considered mature to 6, largely to make them useful. Essentially just a means to make them useful and not useless resource sponges sooner, but personally I recommend full time service for the little bastards. PROJECT SPARTANing them is also an option. Parasol don't care what happens here, and what the monarch doesn't know till he shows won't hurt 'em.

-Integration/Narrative challenge: In universe for the purposes of this game, the incidents of Swordthunders, Battlefailed, Boatmurdered, Headshoots, Syrupleaf and many other great fortresses are said to take place on a cold nightmarish blight upon the world once called Everoc. This is a narrative challenge, and where the invaders

hail from. it is an unpleasant place and those who live there are considered insane. That land is talked of both in casual conversation, and in fearful whispers in regards to certain... unpleasant entities.

Ok, now for the Dwarves

Starting seven

Splint Lokumeshesh: High strung expedition leader and bookkeeper. Respectful of soldiers almost to a fault. Provided the starting seven with their journals. Will be happy to fight to the death for Spearbreakers and "The Wire," his civilization , and was the one given orders to establish the fortress. He has become obsessed with stemming the tide of invaders. Will hand off power as stated by tradition, rather than becoming sick of the role.

Sus Bibandeler: Mason/Miner/Furnace Operator.

Talvieno Dorenarzes: Woodworker/Mechanic. Trade smart, book stupid. May make nonsensical philosophical statements (This was how Talvieno roughly described his dwarf via PM.)

Rodge Zuntirdustik: Mason/Miner/Equipment smith. First to request a dorfing and this is the lot he drew.

Loud Whispers Vucarlibad: Woodworker/Farmer/Brewermeister. Given title of Whisperer cause I couldn't resist.

Stova Amostamath: One of many veterans of the wire. She is a mercenary hired to help kick start the fortress army. Do with this Character as you wish narratively.

Fischer Stingoden: Like Stova, but a former instructor. Also hired to train the army. Do with this Character as you wish narratively.

Overseers: 1 year spring to spring as normal. Was considering two year turns so I could get basic industries going for everyone and the army training started so everyone could start their insane projects early.

Splint - year 1 - [COMPLETE]

Talvieno - year 2 - [COMPLETE]

Mr Frog - year 3 - [COMPLETE]

Draigneau - year 4 - [COMPLETE]

Sus - year 5 - [COMPLETE]

Mitchewawa - year 6 - [COMPLETE]

Paintbrushturkey - year 7 [COMPLETE]

Splint - year 8 - [IN PROGRESS]

We also got our own TVTropes page from nowhere, with Mr Frog maintaining it for us.

*NOTE: No, there aren't any vampires. I was expecting horrible levels of

underpopulation we've been experiencing, and the Vampires seem to enjoy kill the useful dwarves first. If you wanted them in the game to deal with, you've come to the wrong place; I also fucking hate vampires in general.

SPLINT:

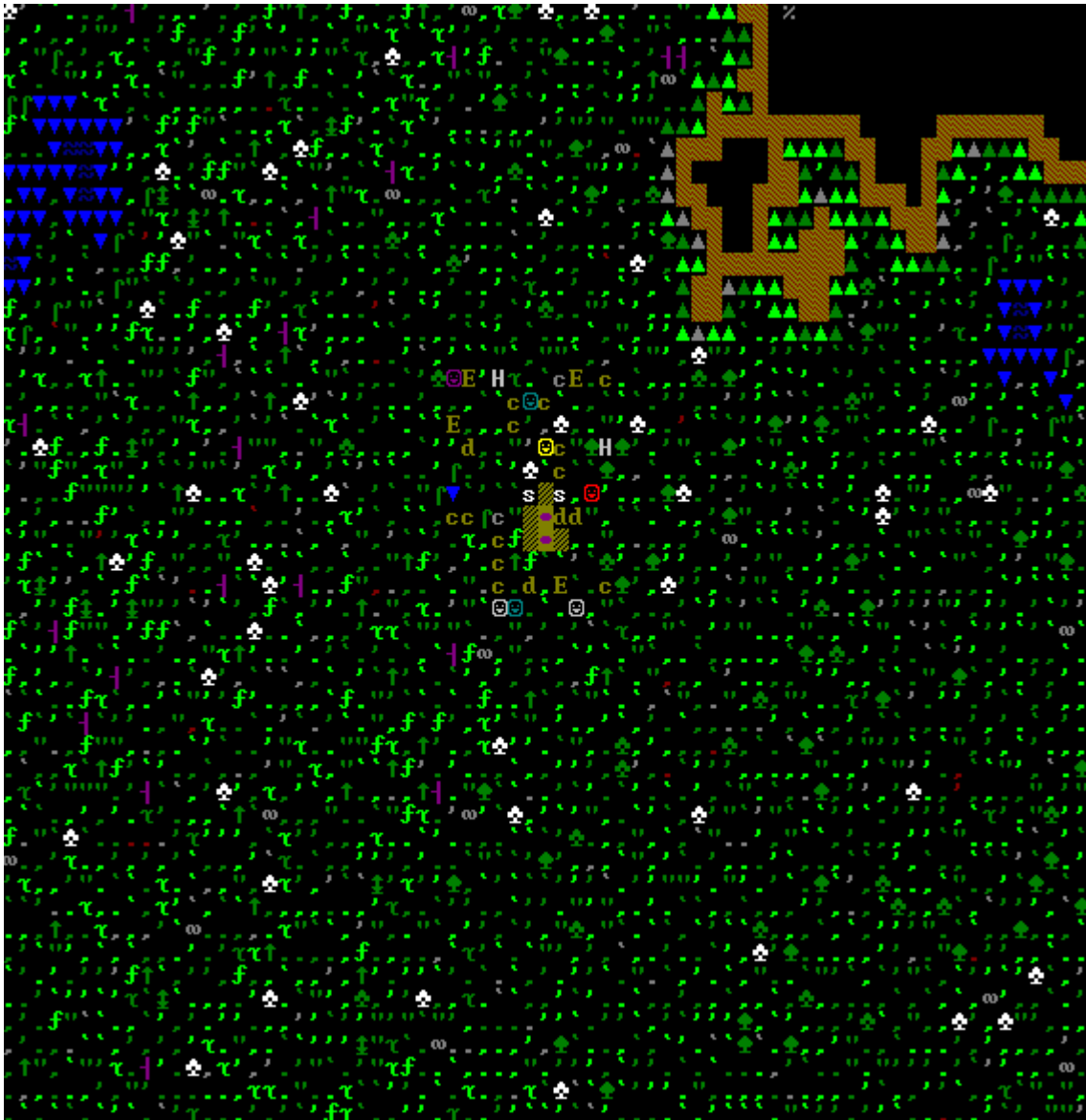
From the journal of Expedition Leader Splint Lokumeshesh, Overseer of
Spearbreakers border fortress

-This is a cat leather bound journal. All crafts dwarfship is of mediocre quality at best. It is bordered with bands of slate and studded with slate. On the front cover is the name "Splint Lokumeshesh" in slate. On the front cover is an image of crossed pikes behind a shield in slate. On the back cover is an image of an elephant in elephant ivory. The elephant is depicted in a pool of liquid and screaming. The elephant is melting.

1st granite, 254 - arrival

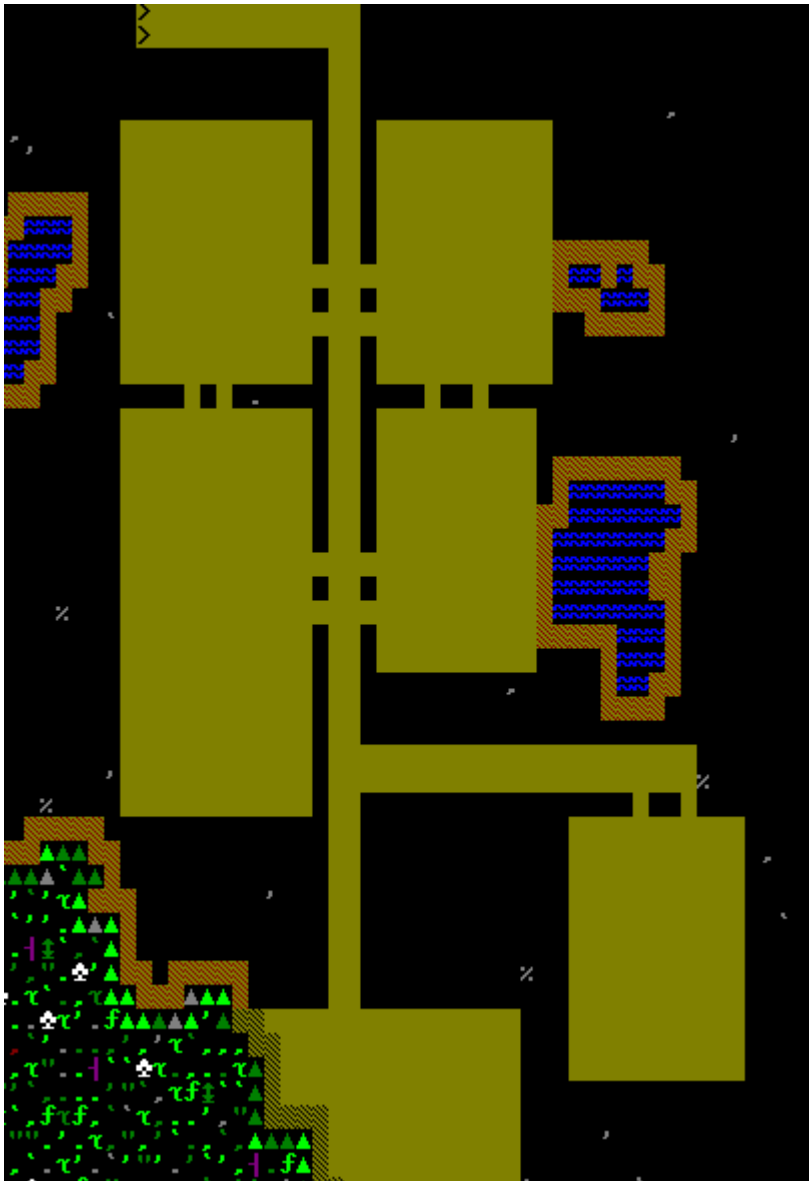
We have arrived, and none too soon. We have brought ample supplies, at least for our small group, and a few extra animals for slaughter. We rested for a day, peering out onto the slightly less wooded plain. Sus said it didn't seem that bad for a terror zone. I must admit I was expecting eyeball grass or some other nightmare. But we'll see what the rains have to say. In the meantime, I did a rough sketch of the site, and the orders given.

You have arrived. After a journey from the Mountainhomes into the forbidding wild finally ended. Your party of seven is to make an outpost for the glory of all of Stemel. There are almost no supplies left, but with stout labor comes sustenance. Whether your dwarves. You are expecting a supply caravan just before winter entombs you, but it secure lodgings, ere the dingoes get hungry. A new chapter of dwarven history begins "Spearbreakers". Strike the earth!

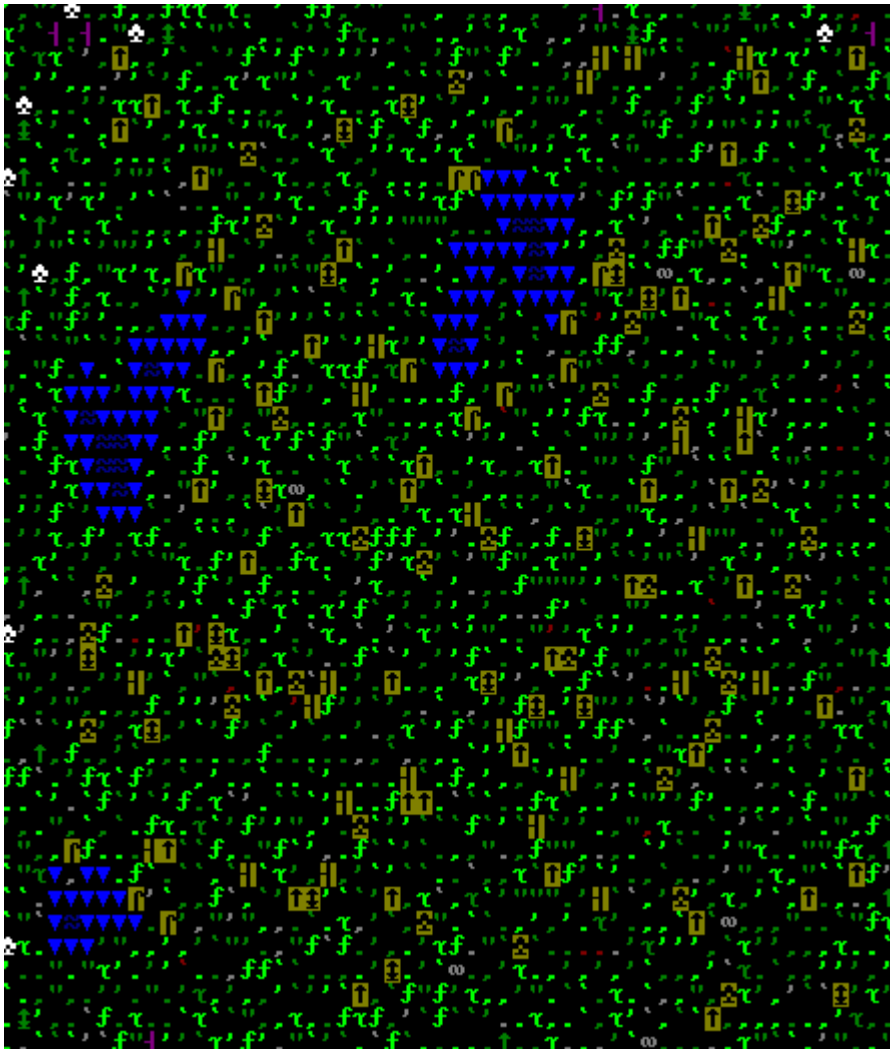


I have Sus and Rodge clearing out space for wood, trade goods, and a depot. I want to get that done and over with. I sent Loud Whispers and Talvieno to chop some tree, while I get Stova and Fischer situated. I intend to have their training space made as soon as possible.

To ensure efficient mining progress, I have instructed both Rodge and Sus to not stop except to take care of needed functions, such as drinking and eating obviously. I hope to hit stone as soon as possible. I have also ordered additional space be had for whatever may be needed: Furnaces, dyer or soap maker shops, whatever.



Rodge and Sus have orders to dig out this space.



The spot of trees I

have ordered Loud Whispers and Talvieno to take care of.

I asked Fischer what they were going to call their squad, and they told me the 'Families of Laboring.' Odd, but whatever floats their boat. Fischer has assumed the rank of Colonel with Stova as her right hand and currently only subordinate. I saw fit to bring a pair of pikes and mail shirts for them.

4th Granite, 254

It's raining blood in the terror zone part of the area. Blood. I have yet to see what it does, but it's disgusting all the same. It appears to be the blood of the invaders, these so-called mountain barbarians. it's red like a dwarf's, but thicker and smelling strongly of burnt meat.

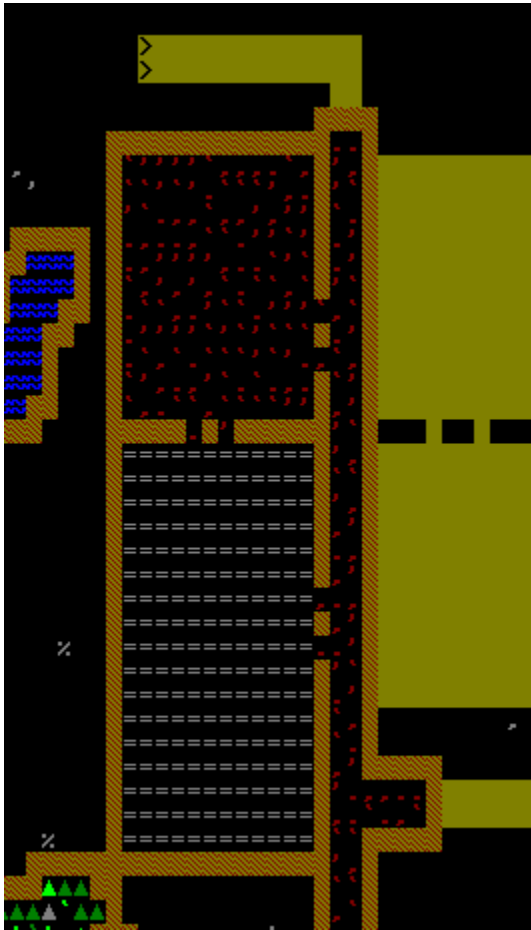
8th granite, 254

The rains are annoyingly sporadic but frequent. It starts and stops randomly as if Armok needs to run the barbarians through a juicer individually. It turned out we had parked right inside the zone, so the wagon is getting rained on. No ill effects so far, so it may just be quirky freak weather.

15th Granite, 254

Regular old shitty weather. I'm actually glad. Sus called to us from inside that the

pile space for the wood and the workshop space for masons and carpenters is finished. They've begun digging out the depot space.



The finished wood pile. Across is to be the craft/trade goods space, below an additional space for whatever.

16th Granite, 200?

It seems I have gone mad a touch. I could have sworn it was 254. No matter. We continue as scheduled.

21st Granite, 200

More barbarian blood. Still regular rain, so I guess it cancels. No major effects seem to be in stemming from the barbarian blood, so now it's just a bit disgusting. Depot space nearly finished. I'll have Loud or Tal make some wood blocks so we can make a nice depot.

25th granite, 200

Stova saw a raven and the damned thing pecked at her while she was bringing some wood in. She shooed it away so no harm done.

28th Granite, 200

The month ended uneventfully. Freakish weather aside, all went well.

2nd Slate, 200

The pit crew finally finished the crafting and trade goods spaces. They'll be throwing

up some masonry shops ahead of time. "Why wait?" Was Sus' argument. I have ordered additional shops be made and sent Stova to work on making hammers for everyone. We brought a lot of pitchblende, so we may as well use it now.

8th Slate, 200

I've decided to use that extra space as an impromptu weapon storage for all our hammers Stova will be making. Fischer has volunteered to take care of making a few things in the carpentry shop so the others may continue to fell trees. She's made the blocks and I have ordered the depot be built.

10th Slate, 200

Seems Stova's a natural with stone. In five hours she had five hammers. I'm quite impressed.

15th Slate, 200

Work on the farm level has begun, and we're digging for stone. Stova's churning out hammers faster than we can store them.



The area for our farms. Only the halls are being dug at present.

17th Slate, 200

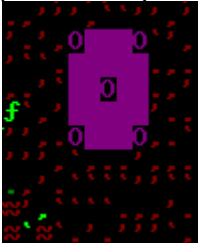
Rodge has reported hitting shale. This will be the residential level. Now we need metals, but that can wait until the farm and pens are dug. I also had to tell Stova to stop making hammers, as she was making the damned things quicker than we thought she would, churning out a dozen a day in the last two days.

20th Slate

marked off some spaces for the hens, emus, our pair of sheep and farm plot to be dug. Saw a few wild turkeys. Nothing overtly eventful aside from more of that gods-awful blood rain.

27th Slate, 200

Depot is done. Sheep and emu pens finished. More of this fucking weather. I figured we'd drown in the blood of our enemies, but not by Armok running them through a juicer in the sky. *[Author's note: Dwarven juicers are of course giant machines used to grind up hippies and goblins for blood sacrifices to Armok. They're big and powered by blood water wheels.]*



Our depot, composed of a few glumprong blocks.

7th Felsite, 200. Interim entry.

Stova informs me that the families who had pitched in should arrive in the next couple of months. Once we have all the hammers moved, I'm going to put her back on hammer manufacturing detail, if we can spare her from training with Fischer.

11th Felsite, 200

The emus are all inside safely, now we just need the hen plot made and a space for other miscellaneous animals. All things considered, Sus and Rodge are doing nicely with this. Guess that's what you get from layers of clay and sand being so easy to dig through. Best of all, we also have sand, so a glass making industry is possible.

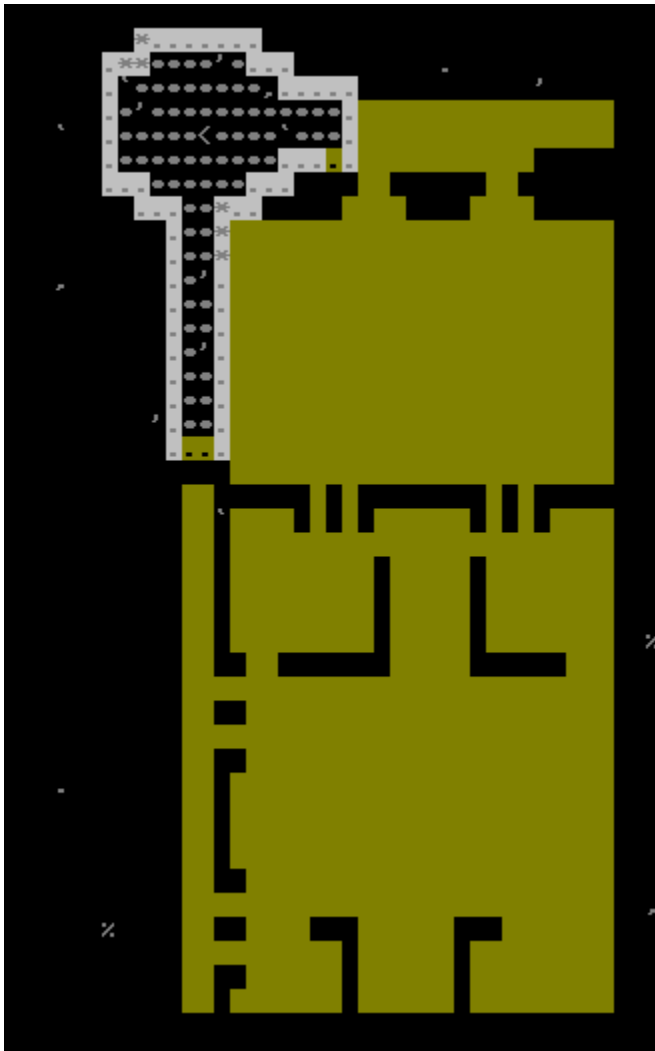
17th Felsite, 200

Loud Whispers threw together an armor stand to be the training area near the barracks. While this means only me, Tal and Loud himself are on hauler duty, it matters little we need good soldiers to train the army after all.

20th Felsite, 200

The farm level is finished. Time to dig out the mess and food storage space and start hunting metals.





I marked this patter out on their maps for the mess hall and food storage.

22nd Felsite, 200

Training is moving more or less smoothly. And it seems we struck lignite! I may well give everyone the day off since this may give us a nice source of fuel for the forges.

23rd Felsite, 200

Hematite! Delicious hematite!

There's hope yet. Now if we happen upon flux we'll be in true dwarven business!

1st Hematite, 200

Summer begins and the family Stova spoke of hasn't shown. Got a furniture space dug, and I'll be marking off the communal dormitory when the mess hall and food store is done.

9th Hematite, 200

Sus and Rodge, while digging the dining hall hit pockets of Rose Quartz, Clear Tourmaline, and native gold all within a few feet of each other! With nothing too horrid yet to cause trouble, this place is turning out to be rather forgiving. I only wish it were a vein of gold and not a cluster. Both the miners have shown scary

progress in their digging, carving out vast swathes in mere hours what took them days to do before.

17th Hematite, 200

Sus dug out a cluster of Carnelians. Training of our Pikedwarves is still going smoothly, if slowly. Considering the institution of the so called "Danger rooms" used by other fortresses when the military expands enough.

18th Hematite, 200

Rodge hit Chrysoprase, Sus hit gypsum. Dunno which is more valuable, but Whatever we find, is ours and we'll like it by Armok!

23rd Hematite, 200

Sus dug out a fair bit of Green Tourmalines. Nothing else to really report. I must say, I thought this would be a test of my sanity, establishing on the edge of the Parasol's cursed experimental dumping grounds.

This place must be plotting against us, I know it. I wonder if it's normal to hear voices calling while there's no-one present....

27th Hematite, 200

Sus hit yet more gems, Onyx this time. I heard the voices again, saying something about a curse and a tower or some such nonsense. I haven't slept well the last two days, so perhaps it's just sleep depravation getting to me...

6th Malachite, 200

Sus says he feels like a legend after all his hard work. And given his discovering not only hematite, but a limonite vein as well, I'm inclined to believe him.

16th Malachite, 200

The dining hall is finished but I may punch a hole in the side to get at the limonite in the wall. Talvieno is working on making mechanisms and Loud Whispers asked me to help him set up a stone crafting industry so we'll have some goods to trade come autumn.

17th Malachite, 200

Saw Stova and Fischer sparring. It warms me heart to see them training. How proud they'll make this fortress... I must admit I'm becoming rather taken with Stova lately. Must be her eyes... Or maybe the way she handles that Pike... Hmm.

23rd Malachite, 200

The family Stova mentioned months ago has finally come. I'll be screening them for military candidates and any random dwarves they picked up on the way here.

They bore the following names and roles

Mitchewawa Istraemoth, a Glazer.

Bombzero Tistaangir, a skilled miner.

The Master Fikodnam and *Draigneau Kisezihi*, old friends and vampiric war veterans, but they seem to have forgotten their old skills. No matter, Fischer will be happy to retrain them.

Doctormonch, highly skilled furnace operator

A fellow who is adamant about going by '*Choppa*,' a woodworker.

And *Stausic Amecshibbi*, a jeweler.

I will have Mitchewawa and Stausic start on those rock crafts while the rest work on making blocks, tables, chairs, and beds. Choppa is working on making some training pikes for Draigneane and The Master now.

3rd Galena, 200

Rodge hit magnetite while digging out the communal dormitory. I will sacrifice an Emu to you Armok if you let us find flux here.... I heard Fischer complaining about being on duty so long. She can sit and spin for all I care. I respect the hell out of her for her skills and trade, but I can't let her bitchiness get in the way of us being ready.

14th Galena, 200

Having not realized it wasn't done, I have marked out the food storage. I feel remarkably stupid but as it stands, I may need to get farms running sooner than I'd like.

20th Limestone, 200

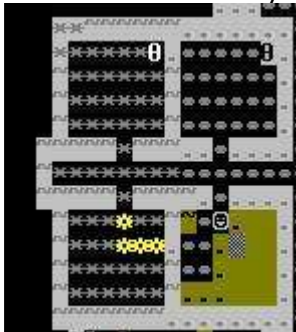
Seems a flock of ravens annoyed Fischer enough to warrant an attack on them yesterday. Evidently during training, The Master and one of the birds were more or less engaging in a shouting match until Fischer threw her pike at the thing. Dead on hit, she picked the pike up and proceeded to stab the shit out of it. I've carved four somewhat spacious rooms for the soldiers, and have beds being set up. I've also got orders for my own chambers be dug.

24th Sandstone, 200

My own chambers are almost done, and furnishings for the soldiers are being commissioned. A few migrants arrived, a glassmaker named Rosan, a Combination leatherworker-tailor named weaver, and a former fisherdwarf named Kannan. I've assigned them to renovation detail, as it's currently slow going. I'm hoping by winter's end I can get the forges set up just below the trade floor. And if someone can get me a table and some doors made I can finally begin taking stock of the junk in this place.

2nd Timber, 200

My office is finally finished. Now to get the troopers their own furnishings. They deserve it since they're putting their lives on the line.



10th Timber, 200

While not fully furnished, the four man squad has their own rooms. I've ordered a forge of sorts be dug built on the farming level.

15th Timber, 200

The Master is getting back into stride with his training pike. Draigneane is taking a

little longer sadly, but they'll all be good soldiers in time.

16th Timber, 200

The Master reported seeing wagons on the horizon, so it seems we have visitors. I've ordered our trinkets be brought up, so we shall see if we can't get ahold of some more food and drink, and perhaps some cloth and leather too. I'll have Choppa make a few extra training pikes to trade, as I've seen those things sell like good plump helmet roasts.

Why those nutters decided to go through the entire blood covered plain to get here I'll never know.



22nd Timber, 200

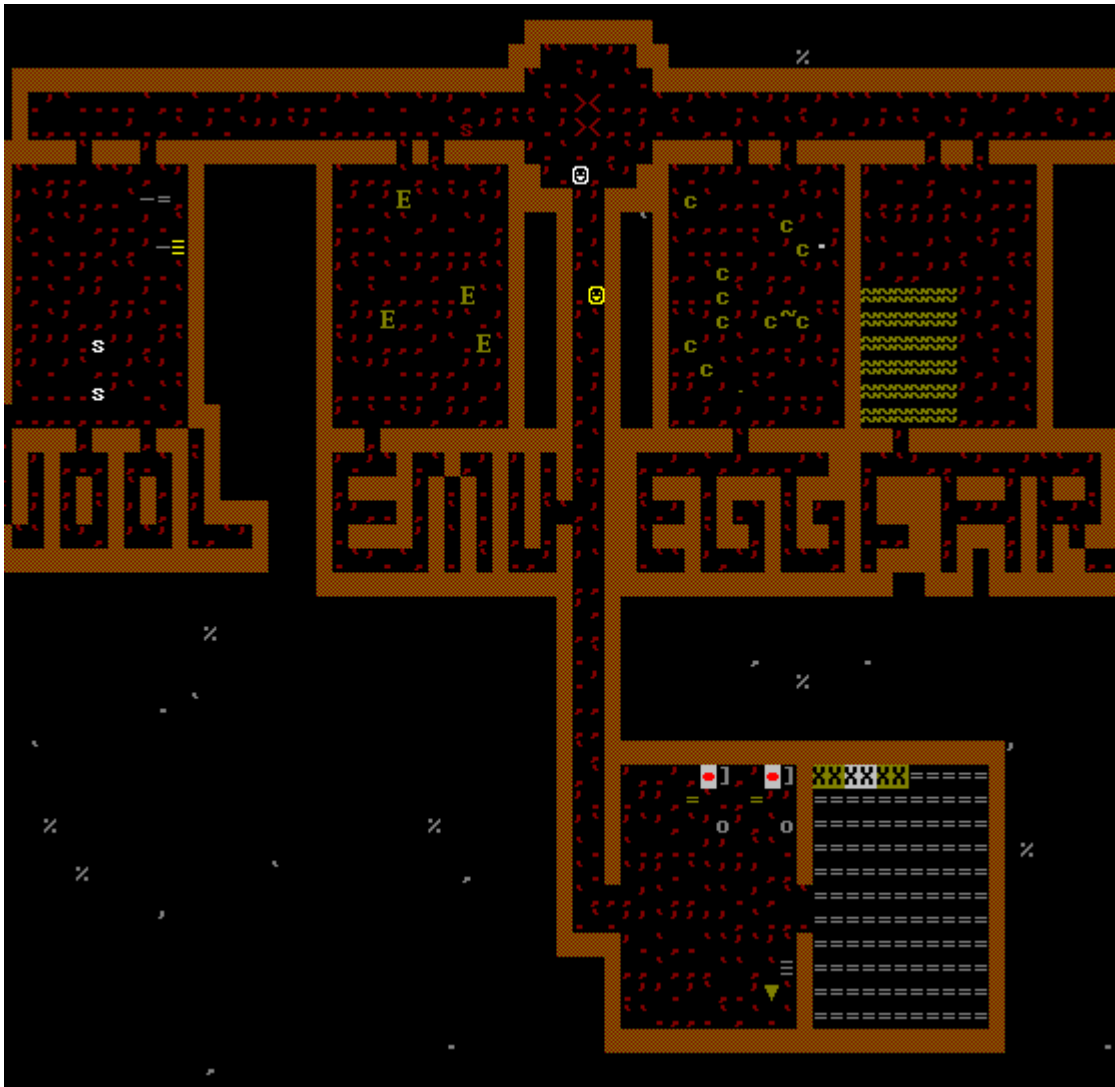
So far we've gotten a few spare barrels a box filled with pigtail cloth and various metal bars, as well as a few pieces of armor including shields and a pair of boots. There was a magnificent steel pike decorated with deer hoof that i wanted to get for Stova, but I had to pass in favor of the booze. After the training pikes are made I'll see about getting a box of leather and some silk cloth in case someone becomes... inspired.

5th moonstone, 200

Talvieno was one hard trader. Spent the last week straight bargaining for some silk threads we could make use of, some meat, and a bit of leather. We shifted our last box of mugs, and a weapon crate with a few excess hammers and a training pike.

10th moonstone, 200

I have gotten the foundations laid for the metalworking industry on the farm floor. We have ample iron ores to work with, and enough lignite to surely armor our first four at least. Hopefully Talvieno, whom I have chosen to be my successor as per overseer tradition, can get things sorted while I focus on the records.



The farm-forge, as you can call it.

I've ordered the following from the capital: More dogs, a lot of metal bars, lots of limestone for steel, a lot of fish, seeds and meat, some leather, cloth, armor, and pikes.

I have also ordered a pair of giant Emus from home. They will make fine fighting animals, and a lot of drinks.

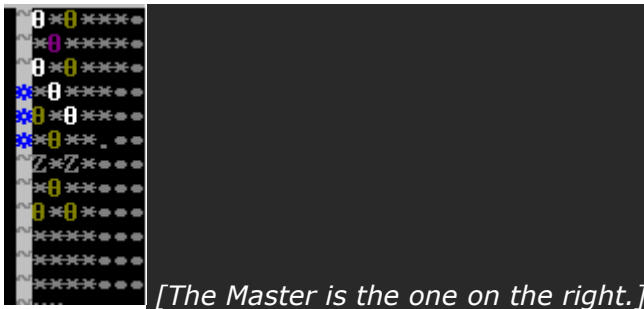
Honestly, had they not come when they did we would have been in trouble drink wise. I have also ordered some petrified wood, to make pillars to display prisoners on to give a huge middle finger to both invaders and the elves in one fell swoop.

14th Moonstone

The merchants have begun packing up and dealings with the liaison are nearly done. I expect he'll take his leave in a week or so.

15th Moonstone, 200

Seems I was off! He finished up and we can now sit and wait for the springtime elf season. I'm sure the soldiers will enjoy having live targets. Sus finished putting up a



28th Obsidian, 200

I've locked down the fortress until the elves decide to show, and I'll be handing off my overseeing duties tomorrow. Kannan is setting about trying to patch up The Master and I have a crutch being made just in case. The Forge was done and fuel production is going smoothly *[note, there's a graphical glitch where the bridge isn't showing while raised. It's there. The pitchblende lever in the furniture shop is linked to it.]* [[Talvieno's note: This wasn't a glitch. Splint built a retracting bridge.]]

1st granite, 201

And so my time here as overseer ends. Current list of things unfinished:

- Dining hall needs engravings, more tables, and chairs.
- Dogs need to be trained. Recommend assigning two to Fischer, and one to everyone else.
- An emu, the horses, and all the wandering roosters need to be slaughtered.
- still and other food making workshops need to be built.
- Iron smelting needs to be put full swing, forge needs to be built proper.
- Sheering the two adult sheep for sutures and a rope for a well.
- Leather, gem, and cloth storage need to be dug.
- Advise using the pond just above the wood store as the communal well.

Here is our current state of affairs:

Created Wealth:	33328*	Population:	17		
Weapons:	1370*				
Armor and Garb:	None	Miners	3	Axedwarves	None
Furniture:	4330*	Woodworkers	2	Axe Lords	None
Other Objects:	18821*	Stoneworkers	None	Swordsdwarves	None
Architecture:	5550*	Rangers	None	Swordmasters	None
Displayed:	2917*	Metalsmiths	1	Macedwarves	None
Held/Worn:	340*	Jewelers	2	Mace Lords	None
		Craftsdwarves	4	Hammerdwarves	None
Imported Wealth:	19473*	Nobles/Admins	None	Hammer Lords	None
Exported Wealth:	2925*	Peasants	None	Speardwarves	3
		Dwarven Children	None	Spearmasters	None
Food Stores:	589	Fishery Workers	1	Marksdwarves	None
Meat	111	Farmers	None	Elite Mrksdwrvs	None
Fish	3	Engineers	1	Wrestlers	None
Plant	None	Trained Animals	None	Elite Wrestlers	None
		Other Animals	34	Recruit/Others	None

I hope Talvieno is up to this task, as I will be staying in my office to keep tabs on the stocks unless he needs any advice. However I strongly advised he set the pikedwarves on killing the pointy-eared hippies when they arrive. Let them unload and then have Stova and the others flatten them.

They are undeserving of our mugs. - Following is a crude drawing of a glowing mug,

a dwarf, and an elf. The elf is thinking while holding the mug. The dwarf is laughing.

[So little happened that I was shocked. Here's a good time to the rest of you, save to follow. And The Master, the goal is to *not* destroy the place utterly. **NOT**. At least not "Intentionally."]

TALVIENO:

This is the leather-bound journal of Talvi Diamondknight. Depicted on the cover is an artist's impression of an engraving of a masterwork leather-bound journal entitled "The Legs of Feasting". Depicted on the back is an image of a dwarf and purring maggots. The dwarf is surrounded by the purring maggots. The dwarf looks terrified. The pages menace with spikes of iron.

1st of Granite, 201

Ach, I have no idea why old Splint thought he ought to give me the job of overseer, with me being a mechanic an' all... I mean, he's mighty attractive and such, far as dwarves go, but still. Least he has no prejudice against us womankind. However, in lookin' back, there might be an earball of truth worth a splinter's hide in what he did - he doesn't know how to build a raising bridge to save his own skin. First thing's first - we have to dig a pit beneath it to get it going the way it's supposed to be. Otherwise, the goblins will just trounce on in here while we're eating our masterpiece wombat intestine roasts - and who'd want that, eh? -wink wink- Bad for us, though - we're going to have to pull the whole thing up afore we can dig under it. I put Sus to work on that, as my first act/duty thing... I need to get used to being leader, fast.



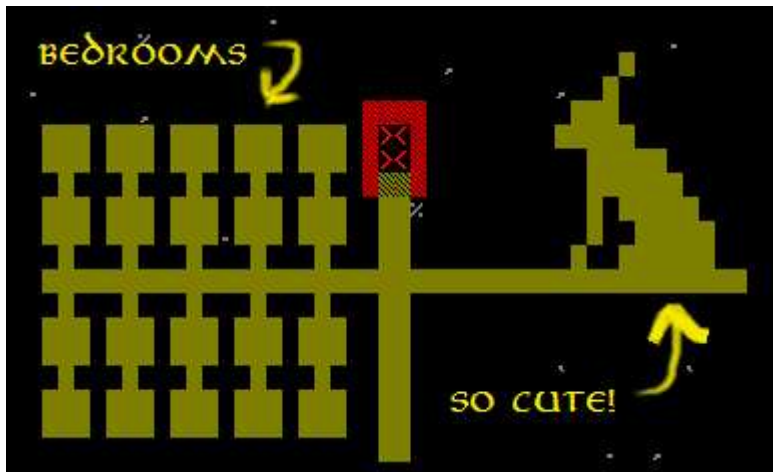
This is as bad luck for us as if we'd happened on a trap hidden in web and gotten everything we wore dumped, as my granpappy used to tell me as we were working on wooden puzzleboxes, when I was a lass.

Also, I think I need a room... I mean, not that I'm getting any action anytime soon - but being overseer and all...

I see about as much reason to build up/down stairs as I see to paint a butterfly blue! Splint didn't build spiral stairs, he built these complex patterns I cain't figure out! I'm building spirals downwards from here on. And I'm designing myself a new room - shaped like my favorite animal, a cavy. I can, right? I'm the boss lady here now. And they're so cute! Might as well have a bit of comfort so long as we're here.

'Talviena' Dorenarces likes anhydrite, fine pewter, marion, highwood wood, pig tail fiber fabric, morningstars she prefers to consume golden blaze and dwarven sugar. She absolutely detests blood gnats.

Long as I'm thinking about it, we do need beds, too... We've gone without proper rooms for well-on nigh a year now. Splint wouldn't let us have any of our own - we had to sleep with everybody and their uncle watching. Well, as I've always said, a well-fed camel avoids gnats - we need those bedrooms. I'll have them built across from mine.



Ugh, and did I mention it's already raining barbarian blood again? The sticky stuff gets stuck to everything.

```
Stray Hen <Tame>

mountain barbarian blood covering <upper body>
mountain barbarian blood covering <lower body>
mountain barbarian blood covering <head>
mountain barbarian blood covering <right upper leg>
mountain barbarian blood covering <left upper leg>
mountain barbarian blood covering <right lower leg>
mountain barbarian blood covering <left lower leg>
mountain barbarian blood covering <right foot>
mountain barbarian blood covering <left foot>
mountain barbarian blood covering <right wing>
mountain barbarian blood covering <left wing>
mountain barbarian blood covering <right eye>
mountain barbarian blood covering <left eye>
mountain barbarian blood covering <throat>
mountain barbarian blood covering <first toe, right

g:Gen i:Inv p:Prf w:Wnd z:St
ESC: Done
```

I can't tell how the poor hen can even see. Worst part is, it's like that for all the rest of us, too.

Also, we need buckets. Kannan says he can't clean The Master without water, and he needs a bucket for it. (I'm betting he just misses the water - he did used to be a fisherwarf, anyhow.)

'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor cancels Clean Patient: Need empty bucket.

It's a wonder we're still alive.

11th of Granite

```
'Choppa' Erushód has created a masterpiece!
You have struck lignite!
It is raining mountain barbarian blood!
'Choppa' Erushód has created a masterpiece!
You have struck green jade!
'Choppa' Erushód has created a masterpiece!
```

Choppa is churning out masterpiece wooden buckets - they beat anything I've ever seen - but pointless, all the same... More pointless are the farms - we've been ordered not to touch them. I aim to change that. Sadly, we can't spare anybody for

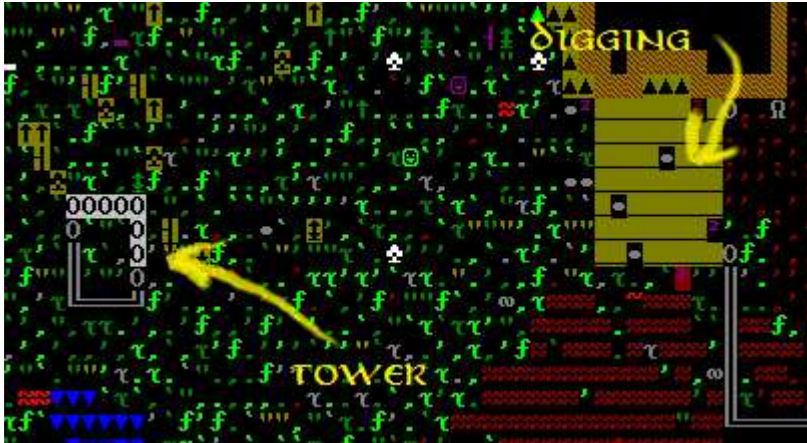
farming just yet... but it won't be long. I'm sure we'll have travelers passing by afore too much longer, and I'll put them to work.

3rd of slate

oh, Armok... we need to make some real weapons for the soldiers. The Master already decided he loves his little wooden quarterstaff. He's standing there right now, even as I write this, caressing it and telling it how he's going to "take it away to his castle in the clouds", and such. We need those weapons!

→ 'The Master' Fikodnam, Pikedwarf has grown attached to a chestnut training pike!

Also, I've decided we ought to build us a tower - a nice tall one. I was saying to myself, "Why, Talvi... The birds in the sky may call their home the nest, but what is the sky to a peach tree?" And ya'll know how yellow peaches are. Anyhow, since we cain't build extra layers above the depot, thanks to the roof, we're making a tower. We might get some marksdwarves who can carry a good strong crossbow to fire at any who might siege us. That would be wonderful to see - and keep our pikemen safe, too. If necessary, we could build collapsing floors to crush our enemies, off the sides of the tower.



Sadly for miss Bombzero, she can't keep making her mugs. For some reason she thought it'd be great to have shelves and shelves of the little things... But she's one of our best miners - I need her in the mines!

I think I'm startin' to do a pretty good job as leader here.

14th of slate

Maybe I'm not doing so well after all... It's like the pumpkin said to the hay bale, "I go with you, but I am not you, nor are you juiced". The poor pumpkin shoulda been juiced, he deserved it... It's sad. But anyhow, I accidentally had Rodge dig the moat into one of our tunnels below... Now I'm trying to seal it off.



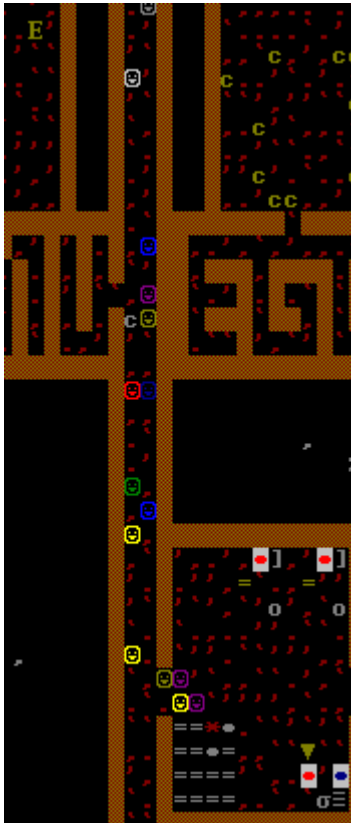
To complicate things, we got migrants and such - three docs, two bowyers, a fisherman, an engraver/mechanic who's going by the name of "Mr. Frog" (he must have bumped his head somewhere pretty hard, but he does good work), another mechanic, a miner, a mason, an architect (what the rutil do we need THAT for?), and an herbalist.



At any rate, we now have a total population of 33 - that'll keep us going strong for a mite longer.

Hamlet Lokumokab, "Spearbreakers"											
Animals		Kitchen		Stone		Stocks		Health		Justice	
Created Wealth:		46639*		Population:		33					
Weapons:		1370*									
Armor and Garb:		None		Miners		0 4		Axe Lordes		0 None	
Furniture:		6060*		Woodworkers		0 3		Axe Lords		0 None	
Other Objects:		26200*		Stoneworkers		0 1		Swordsdwarves		0 None	
Architecture:		8043*		Rangers		0 1		Swordmasters		0 None	
Displayed:		4626*		Metalsmiths		0 1		Macedwarves		0 None	
Held/Worn:		340*		Jewelers		0 1		Mace Lords		0 None	
				Craftsdwarves		0 6		Hammerdwarves		0 None	
Imported Wealth:		31960*		Nobles/Admins		0 4		Hammer Lords		0 None	
				Peasants		0 None		Speardwarves		0 4	
Exported Wealth:		2925*		Dwarven Children		0 None		Spearmasters		0 None	
				Fishery Workers		0 2		Marksdwarves		0 None	
Food Stores:		527		Farmers		0 3		Elite Mrksdwrvs		0 None	
Meat		92		Engineers		0 3		Wrestlers		0 None	
Fish		None		Trained Animals		A None		Elite Wrestlers		0 None	
Plant		None		Other Animals		A 51		Recruit/Others		0 None	

else'd do - like carrying around rocks and such. I was walking to my workshop, and I saw at least ten of them running up and down that yonder hallway, carrying those huge slate boulders the miners had dug out from way deep. This is good - it'll let the masons build our watchtower double quick!



I'll be settin' them strong, handsome dwarves some jobs soon - perferrably somewheres I can supervise 'em... Perhaps the farms. We could use some work going on down there anyhow.

I'm two months in, had a few problems getting set up, but it's all fine now. It'll come a lot faster after this, but I wanted to get this up before I went to bed. Plenty of people to choose from to dwarf, lots happening, no attacks yet. Looks like a good year so far. 😊 (also, splint, you dwarfed me as a girl... lol)

SPLINT:

27th Slate, 201. Interim entry

I don't see why I got berated for the minor hiccups I made during my time as Overseer. Granted I neglected to tell Talvi to make the bridge raise like I intended, but that was just lack of foresight on my part.

I'm glad she set to getting everyone else their own rooms. Why in one of the dirt layers I don't know, but I guess that means the stone layer is for the communal

spaces and for soldiers to sleep in. Perhaps I should've had Doctormonch get some iron made so Draigneau and The Master would have proper weapons and a pick for Bombzero, Considering that The Master has become quite taken to the little piece of wood I gave him for training and Bombzero seems to be a bit obsessive in regards to making mugs from what I hear. Stova said it's not becoming for a dwarf to get attached to a wood weapon. Too elvish, she said. Fischer was going to beat him for getting so attached to it, but thankfully more level head prevailed. That stupid Kobold had already messed up his foot, we didn't need him getting a concussion from an angry CO to boot.

Haven't had a lot of time to write thanks to bookkeeping, but I hope I can get out to see Stova and the others more often.

THE MASTER:

Journal of The Master: Entry Eight

THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE CHESTNUT AWAY TO THE HAPPY HOME WITH TREES AND FLOWERS AND CHIRPING BIRDS AND BASKET WEAVERS WHO SIT AND SMILE AND TWEEDLE THEIR THUMBS AND TOES AND THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE ME AWAY TO THE FUNNY FARM WHERE LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL ALL THE TIME AND I'LL BE HAPPY TO SEE THOSE NICE YOUNG DWARVES IN THEIR CLEAN WHITE COATS AND THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE ME AWAY!!

TALVIENO:

Continued from the journal of Talvi Diamondknight

25th of slate, 201

I suppose I oughta start with saying that I forgot to say, but switched the rooms down to under the dirt and stuff - we're going to have us solid rock rooms! Everybody's happy with that, mainly because none of them really liked the idea of little worms crawling through the walls. Mitchewawa and Bombzero have already claimed their rooms. We kinda need more doors, though... I'm gonna have someone get to work on that.



We also need a well... there ain't no river anywhere near, so I'm gonna have to have the miners dig down and hope we hit some watery caverns. Meanwhile, I'm gonna just go and chop some wood... I'll be safe...



Kingsnakes aren't poisonous... right?

3rd of Felsite, 201

Armok's beard... Kannan, our head doctor, just went sick in the head. The irony is mighty powerful here.

'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor has been possessed!

Least he claimed a craftsdfwarf workshop, and not something more useful.



Anyhow, I decided to make some more room for workshops. We could use a couple more, and I don't want us fogging ever'thing up in the main rooms.

Meanwhile, Mr. Frog is creating masterwork mechanisms. He might be a bit eccentric, with that there name and all, but he's got a pretty good head on his shoulders - seemed I misjudged him a bit.

'Mr. Frog' Spishabtham has created a masterpiece!

11th of Felsite, 201



Cerol, our new architect, is finally working on making that bridge I ordered rebuilt. I guess there's something to book learning after all... I could've known anyhow, by myself - it's like I've always said: Kumquats are like onions - both make you cry. I had the knowledge, I just wasn't using it.

Oddly enough, Cerol seem to be content with her new job... just so long as I keep making doors.

Cerol Keskalrith has been quite content lately. She admired a fine Door lately.

Maybe I'll put an extra one in her room to keep her happy.

20th of Felsite, 201

By the gods... We've struck gold! Solid, pure, beautiful gold! We're gonna be rich! By all the holy bouncing carp that walk upon this world, we're going to be rich as kings! Rich as kings! I'm gonna have a gold cavy statue in my room!

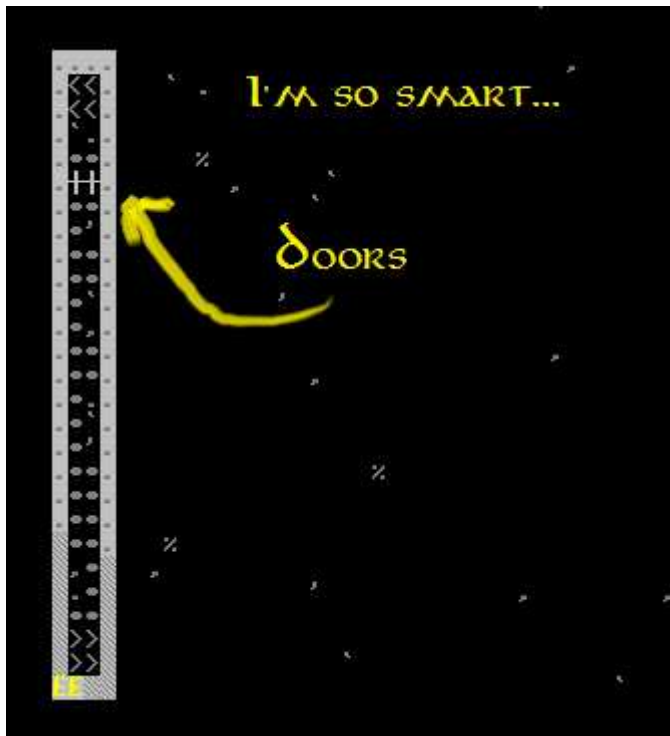


Sadly, our good stroke of luck has something bad going with it too... We got an elven caravan here. At least we can dump some of our fine mugs on 'em... maybe they'll swap us some good booze. Odd you have to swap booze with the stuff you drink it from...

Also, we hit the caverns, and what would you know, but there's water!



I've set the miners digging towards it from above.
Sadly, though - we came out right at ground level - anything that wants to come in, can. I've taken measures to ensure that we might block whatever it is out... hopefully.



Meanwhile, Kannan's locked himself up in the workshop, muttering about jewels... We needa find him some, afore he loses it and goes all batshit crazy on us.

Also, we got thieves coming in here! They got away afore I could see, though, so I'm afraid I can't draw you a picture. Splint didn't see them either, for obvious reasons...

```
g: Move Goods to/from Depot
t: Trade

r: Trader requested at depot
b: Anyone may trade

Broker:
'Splint' Lokumesesh, manager
Eat
Broker can access depot
```

Also, it's raining blood again. The elves don't seem to mind too bad, they drank a bit of it on the way over. Ugh, that's elves for you, though.

(written later:) our militia did tell of the battle between us and the thieves, though... They wrote a pretty long report about it... I'll include a bit of it here.

```
The Holistic Spawn Thief bites The Pikedwarf in the right hand, tearing
the fat and bruising the muscle through the <pig tail fiber right
mitten>!
The Holistic Spawn Thief latches on firmly!
```

25th of Felsite

Stova's stuck out there in the mountain barbarian blood. I took everyone off duty - these thieves are too much of a match for us, just armed with our little wooden pikes. Stova apparently got bitten a few times, and scratched up pretty badly - the thief wasn't trying to hurt her either - just trying to get away. By the gods, what have we stumbled into here?



She's unhappy, but it fortunately only seems like it's because of patrol duty. Splint, the good man that he is, likely won't be too happy about this at all.

'Stova' Amostenäth has been very unhappy lately. She was upset about being relieved from duty. She was enraged in her bedroom recently. She was woken by noise while sleeping lately. She had a satisfying sparring session recently. She is romantically involved with 'Splint' Spearspin. She is a citizen of the Hesperian Outpost. She is a member of the Pack of Strength. She is an owner of the last of the world. She is eighty-one years old, born on the 7th of Moonstone in the year 120. Her right hand is cut open. Her right hand is dented. Her right foot is cut open. She has loaded a tall body with incredible muscles. Her very long hair is braided. Her slightly rounded copy eyebrows are low. Her lips are slightly thick. Her nose is slightly hooked. Her head is somewhat short. Her eyes are wrinkled. Her hair is ecru with a touch of gray. She is unbelievably strong and very slow to tire, but she is susceptible to disease. 'Stova' Amostenäth likes lignite, nickel silver, rock crystal, the color green-yellow and gems. When possible, she absolutely detests slugs. She has a natural ability with music, a good kinesthetic sense, an ability to read emotions fairly well and a sense of humor. She is quick to anger. She rarely feels discouraged. She is assertive. She is not a risk-taker. She is candid and to compromise with others. She cackles when she's nervous. She chews her lips when she gets excited. She needs working outdoors and grumbles only mildly at inclement weather. A short, sturdy creature fond of drink and industry.

26th of Hematite

Oh, gods... oh, gods, oh gods... Splint sat me down and had a talk with me - he seemed horribly anxious about Stova for some reason, though he wouldn't tell me why - but he did tell me a horrible tale that'll live on in my dreams forever - it was no yarn he spun, either - it's true history, true as any leafbug flying through the water is like a mosquito's arms.

He sat me down in his old office, in a little wooden chair - it squeaked under me, but I didn't say anything, and Splint began. "Long ago," he said, "There was a certain fortress called Headshoots. They had brilliant tacticians, brilliant warriors, and were considered invincible in practically every way, or so the legends go."

I shifted uneasily in my chair. I didn't like where this was going.

Splint continued, in a hushed tone. "Headshoots was founded in the very deepest concentrations of evil, in isolation in one of the most inhospitable environments known to dwarvenkind. It was more or less the last Dwarven outpost before the aboveground dominions of Hell itself. It fought valiantly, and remained undefeated.

It grew despite everything the enemy threw at it - goblins, undead, even the unholy demons themselves - but that only made it stronger. It was as a beacon of light in the darkest reaches of the world."

So many long words... but I thought I understood. These invaders... I was beginning to wonder what they were. Something hideous, unholy... The militia described them as "monsters of dwarvenform, with claws and shriveled husks of bodies." But Splint continued.

"Talvi, I need you to understand before I continue that this cannot leave this room." I nodded my assent, and he went on. "Headshoots finally fell - not directly through the hands of the enemy, but by its own sword.

"Of all the inhabitants of Headshoots, the greatest were the mighty Nemo, and the unstoppable Holistic Detective. Nemo, the unstoppable blade, was without a doubt the greatest swordswarrior of his age, and likely the greatest since the days of Sankis himself. Holistic, the invincible shield, wearer of 'Trailmachines, the Fellowship of Right' - a masterpiece spiked adamantine plate mail studded with gems beyond value - she was so sure she was invincible that she had dropped her platinum hammer in favor of wielding a rat leather backpack."

I nodded, indicating he could go on.

"These were only the greatest of legions upon legions of soldiers - some say they numbered in the hundreds. But a dark power slept under the mountain - some say it was the soul of Sankis himself, the dwarf of old who chose to become a living vessel of the darkest gods of the mortal plane, and killed an entire fortress and a legion of elephants while ablaze with unholy flame. But whatever it was, it drew Nemo and Holistic to the deepest region of the fortress, where they succumbed to the evil presence, turning into evil, bloodthirsty skeletons.

"They say the records are lost, as there were no survivors, save for a single dwarf who was locked away in a room in the dungeons. But there was a massacre at Headshoots - not a soul survived the onslaught of the two powerful champions of dwarvenkind, possessed by the forces of evil, taking pleasure in torturing their victims, until there was not a living thing left alive."

At this, I was confused - what were these creatures our men saw earlier, what hurt Stova?

Splint took a draught of beer from his mug and leaned forward, a grim look in his eyes, and the faintest hint of fear. "Talvi, some say that the two skeletal warriors turned on each other when no one was left, out of bloodthirsty need for battle. Others maintain that Nemo regained control of his actions and attacked Holistic Detective, attempting to destroy her before she destroyed all of dwarvenkind. Either way, the result was the same. Nemo severed both of Holistic's hands, but could not pierce the adamantine shell of Trailmachines, and Holistic counterattacked with her own teeth. Latching on, she shook him with her great strength until all Nemo's bones were shattered and she stood alone in Headshoots."

Here he paused, and I ventured a question. "Splint, It was a long time afore now. Holistic couldn't still be alive, could she? Same way a lute's strings remain after broken?" I fidgeted myself in my chair, uncomfortable.

He shook his head. "Don't assume things unknown to you, Talvi. While that was long ago, Holistic - driven, as some say, by Sankis's spirit - created Spawn - misshapen dwarven creatures that are driven by the same spirit as Holistic herself was - they stop at nothing - nothing - to destroy all life. They drove the barbarians from their home in the far off, icy mountains, which is why they're here at all - this isn't their home. Not only that, but the Spawn have an especial hatred of dwarvenkind. A single Holistic Spawn is capable of destroying legions of dwarves. We're very lucky my sweet Stova survived at all. But Holistic herself still survives... somewhere out there, she is waiting - tales of her destroying entire mountainhomes

circulate still. And like bees, killing the queen doesn't kill the hive."

I thought his analogy ridiculous, though I didn't say so.

He hesitated, fear apparent in his eyes. I'd never seen him like this, not in all the years I've known him. "Talvi... The Holistic's Spawn..." his voice dropped to a whisper, "they've found us..."

They've haunted my dreams since.

1st of Hematite

The appearance of the spawn has had a profound effect on the soldiers, who exchange fearful glances among themselves. I can't say I blame them, but earlier Fischer came up to me and said in his thick accent, "Miz Talvi, I know one of 'em o'her soldiers mighta said somthin', but I wanted to ask for m'self.." his voice lowered, and I knew what he would say. I told him to shush, and to tell the other soldiers everything would be all right. [[Talvieno's note: This is the only spot in the story where Fischer has an accent. Chalk it up to Talvi's bad memory, I suppose.]]

We traded some mugs for some booze and plant food - it's not much, but it oughta get us on by for a bit. I bought some golden blaze to try to raise everyone's spirits - it didn't help much - they drink it like its water. There's no cheer here anymore, and everyone else is starting to feel on edge.

Kannan finished his creation - a gypsum ring. It'll only fetch about 4800 coppers, but it's better than nothing. Doesn't even menace with spikes.

Istpiebe, "Skewerlabors", a gypsum ring
This is a gypsum ring. All craftsduarfiship is of the highest quality. On the item is an image of a pear cut ge
sun in onyx.

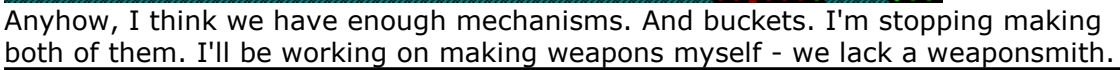
Rodge started a party - that might help raise everyone's spirits a bit, but mostly everyone who attends simply stands around silently, looking at each other. By the gods, I pray this passes...

Mr. Frog' Spishabtham has created a masterpiece!
'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor has created Istpiebe, a gypsum ring!
Mr. Frog' Spishabtham has created a masterpiece!
It is now summer.
It is raining mountain barbarian blood!
Mistêm Moziboltar, Bone Doctor cancels Store Item in Barrel: Job item misplaced.
→The Miner 'Rodge' Zuntîrdùstik has organized a party at shale Table.

15th of Hematite, 201

Why did Splint give me the position of leader? He's the one with more training in battle - I don't know what I'm doing here worth a horseshoe crab in a glumprong! I offered him the position back, and would you know, he turned it down. He said it wasn't yet time, and while he might try his hand at it later, for now it wasn't his to take. I fear he's lost hope.

Asides that, the tower and drawbridge are both bein' built and all. Rosan is working on the bridge - she seems pretty confident, at least. We need to have them up in time...



At least Stova is already back to work. She seems happier now, too.

As if we didn't have enough to deal with already...

I don't think it can get in, but I'm not completely sure... at least I've got a few pikes

made worth somethin'. I dunno if I can get The Master to part with his "beloved", though.

On another note, the bridge is up. I'm putting the lever for it at the northern end of the dining room - hopefully the next overseer won't neglect to read my journal. yes, I did just say that... I don't know how much more my poor nerves can take. I'm only a mechanic, after all...

22nd of Malachite

It's been a bit since my last entry, but not much has happened. Everyone moves sluggishly, it seems. I attribute it the appearance of those cursed beings, but it's not something I would tell anyone.

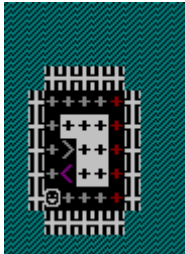


To start off with, we've expanded the bedrooms a bit - we need to get them smoothed, and we're working on that now. My bedroom still doesn't have a bed - I've been sleeping in the hospital. I can't bring myself to have them put the bed into my room.



I've had the miners add a still and a refuse room to the eastern side of the fort. The refuse room is in case of a siege, and not to be used constantly. It won't help much with miasma, but at least it will keep us from having to live with it all through the fort - it'll stay confined to that one room.

We've added the top portion of the tower - the fortifications. I've had the masons build stairs so that, if needed, we can add more constructions above without too much effort.



We've gotten a new wave of migrants - just a few, unfortunately - and I'll soon be closing the drawbridge. Nothing will be able to get out, but at least nothing can get in, either.....

Hamlet Lokumokab, "Spearbreakers"											
Animals		Kitchen		Stone		Stocks		Health		Justice	
Created Wealth:		82280*		Population:		40					
Weapons:		4630*		Miners		4		Axe Lord		None	
Armor and Garb:		None		Woodworkers		3		Axe Lords		None	
Furniture:		9345*		Stoneworkers		1		Swordsdwarves		None	
Other Objects:		43992*		Rangers		1		Swordmasters		None	
Architecture:		15134*		Metalsmiths		1		Macedwarves		None	
Displayed:		7479*		Jewelers		1		Mace Lords		None	
Held/Worn:		1700*		Craftsdwarves		6		Hammerdwarves		1	
Imported Wealth:		39722*		Nobles/Admins		4		Hammer Lords		None	
Exported Wealth:		4025*		Peasants		1		Spearwarves		4	
Food Stores:		524		Dwarven Childrn		None		Spearmasters		None	
Meat		44		Fishery Workers		3		Marksdwarves		1	
Fish		None		Farmers		5		Elite Mrksdwarvs		None	
Plant		68		Engineers		3		Wrestlers		1	
		Seeds 268		Trained Animals		None		Elite Wrestlers		None	
		Drink 88		Other Animals		54		Recruit/Others		None	
		Other 56									

But for now, I'm going to get some shuteye. I'll see that they're assigned good jobs in the morning.

SPLINT:

2nd Hematite, 201. Interim entry

I'll make them pay for hurting Stova.... I'll make them pay... Journal, you are all that keeps me sane at this very moment, as the minute I was informed Stova was hurt I had thrown my tankard at Fischer and gotten knocked back to my senses with a nice bronze boot to the testicles. That damned thing beat Stova and she'd been a veteran of some of the worst battles of the vampiric wars... I swear to all the gods, and to you, Sankis if you're causing my mini spurts of madness, *I. Will. Kill. Them. All.*

And if I must I'll go to hell itself and crush your very essence. You will not claim this fortress. This is *OUR* hole in the ground and you've no rights to it!

Ugh... I need to go back to my accounting books. Perhaps there's more ore that needs cataloging. -Following is an image of a dwarf with a purple glowing hammer and a strange monster in dimple dye. The dwarf is striking down the monster

3rd Hematite, 201. Interim entry

Where the hell did this drawing come from? Am I going so mad I draw these things without realizing it?

(Mr Frog): Talvi just PM'd me this lovely image:



And would like y'all to kindly take note of the incredible quantity and variety of severed body parts. Also, gotta love the random butcher's shop next to the trade depot.

Fortunately, with my *genius intellect*, it took me only 5 seconds to figure out how to solve the problem of the stranded Spawn 🐸

(Splint): Please tell me that is a dead caravan guard....

[[Talvieno's note: It was indeed determined to be a caravan guard, flung from the bridge as it closed. Mr Frog wrote a short story about the last moments of the dwarf's life.]]

MR FROG:

A dwarf runs across a bridge. Behind him is a sight he thought he would only ever see in his darkest nightmares.

The dwarf is a soldier. That does not matter to him now. He had relinquished all claim to pride or courage the moment those *things* had appeared over the horizon. Now, all he cares about is getting safely across the drawbridge before it closes, sealing his fellow dwarves safely inside the fortress and, incidentally, sealing him outside with *them*. For this soldier, fighting was no longer a conceivable option -- the

caravan guards had been torn to shreds, and they had the benefit of decent protective gear. All that is left is escape -- the chance to hopefully live to fight another day, as the cliché goes. He runs, trying to block out the agonized screams of the caravanners, the screeches of the *thing* chasing him, and the frantic beating of his own heart. At this, he fails.

The bridge shifts sickeningly beneath the soldier's feet, and suddenly the world is upside-down. A few moments later, the soldier picks himself off the dirt, looks up, and realises that he had landed on an outcropping of some sort. His heart sinks; there doesn't seem to be any way to get down. Then, the soldier realises, hardly daring to believe it, that this meant that the *things* didn't have any way to get up. He sighed in relief. He was safe. The others would likely realise he was missing and send miners to burrow him back inside.

Something screeches. The soldier turns around, his blood turning to ice. The *thing* is there with him. It looks at him, rage burning in its eyes. The soldier looks around himself wildly. There is no escape.

He takes a deep breath, steels his nerves, and charges, praying his death would be quick.

Several moments later, the Spawn stands over its fresh kill, dwarven blood dripping from the gash on its torso, and lets out a victory cry.

TALVIENO:

8th Galena, 201, Late Summer

It's started raining - the first real rain I seen yet. This is a blessing - everybody's acting better now - saw a smile earlier today on Splint's face. I think his sweet Stova is getting better. I'm actually starting to like her, all jealousy aside. I can only hope that this keeps up.

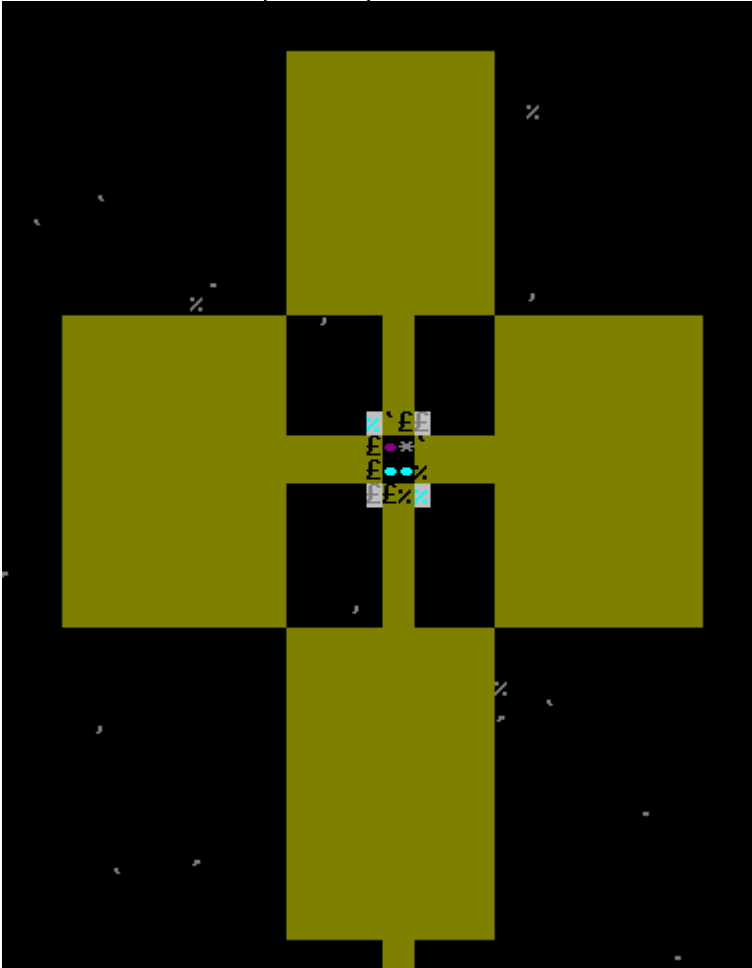
17th of Galena

We've gotten a human caravan comin' over - wagons and all. So much better than elves. Anyhow, they gotta walk through the blood all the same. I feel bad for the barbarians that got spread like butter on a pecan's eye. Everybody's in higher spirits, though - I'm takin' advantage of it and helping us get a lot done.

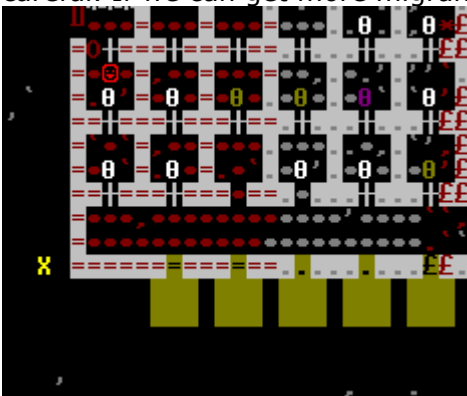


I told the miners to mine out a bunch of stuff belowground - it'll serve as a graveyard of sorts, and it'll help us get our coffins put somewhere we can actually use them.

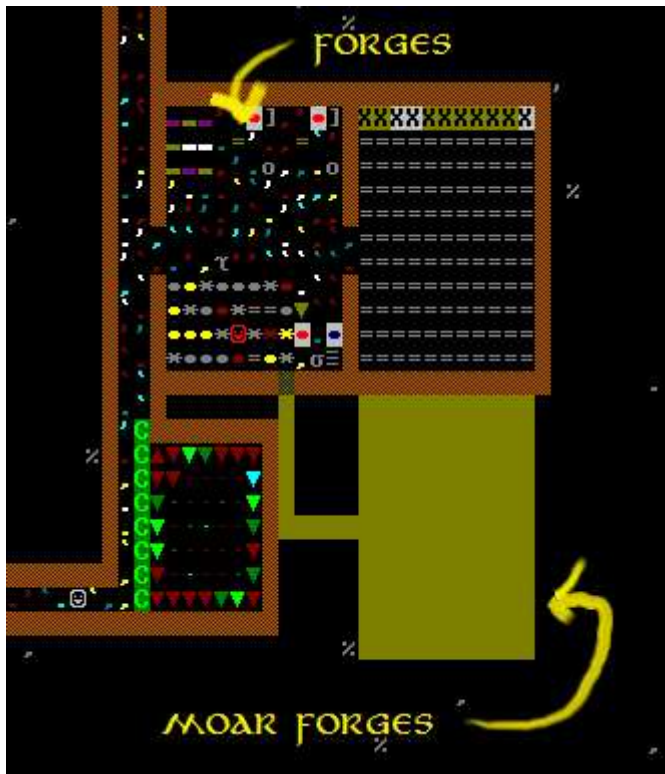
Armok knows we'll probably need them...



We're also buildin' a few more rooms down yonder, past the hallway with the bedrooms. Might need some more space for migrants, you know? Can't be too careful. If we can get more migrants, we're prob'ly saved.



Since we need to start a major weapon making industry (that's the right word, right?), I decided to build a new room down south of the forges, where we can build even more forges. That oughta get us some armor in a jiffy.



Meanwhile, all our soldiers are back to training. We've got a full battalion now - ten soldiers. And they're learnin' right quick, too. Things are looking better... but there's always that threat looming on the horizon... just like a mint sliding down a drainpipe...



27th of Galena

Now that the humans are inside, I'm closing the bridge. I don't want anybody sneakin' in like they did when the elves were here.



We traded a whole fuggle-ton of mugs for some weapons, shields, and booze. I figure we can do without the meat for now - we've got enough animals to slaughter. You can see how I built a butcher's shop in the bottom left hand corner of the drawing above - that's where we do our killin's.

We're finally gettin' the war dogs trained! I want one by my side at all times. I don't wanna risk getting chopped up somewheres, just because I didn't never put on no armor.

```
It has started raining.
You have struck sphalerite!
The Stray Horse Foal <Tame> has been slaughtered.
An animal has become a Stray war Dog.
An animal has become a Stray war Dog.
An animal has grown to become a Stray Dog.
→An animal has grown to become a Stray Ram.
```

11th of limestone, early autumn

by the gods... it was Stova... she... oh, gods... Stova turned into one of Holistic's Spawn... Splint couldn't bring himself to come see - he knew what happened. He knew she might do this... The human caravan guards didn't know what to make of it, but they started on her right quick. She was still fightin' them, even when they cut off her arms - she'd bite them wit her teeth, and she kicked like a demon... oh, poor Stova! What a horr'ble way to go!



She looked so hideous... she was so beat up, and she just wouldn't die! I dunno how she survived it... but she was writhing, and her shirt was ripped apart, her chest split open... it was like teeth! it was so horrible! She's still out there now... The entire militia is workin' on her, but she won't give up!

'Stova' Amostenāth

A twisted mockery of dwarvenkind spawned from the womb of a fallen dwarven heroine. It has a ravaging gash down its face and two gnarled, bony arms tipped with claws.

Her right upper leg is broken. Her right upper leg is cut open. Her right upper leg is bruised. Her right foot is bruised. Her first toe, right foot is broken. Her first toe, right foot is smashed open. Her first toe, left foot is cut open. Her left foot is bruised. Her lower body is cut open. Her lower body is bruised. Her gut is cut open. Her upper body is bruised. Her head is cut open. Her head is bruised. Her left upper leg is broken. Her right lung is bruised. Her liver is broken. Her liver is bruised. Her left upper arm is broken. Her left lower leg is cut open. Her left lower leg is bruised. Her middle spine is broken. Her middle spine is bruised. Her fourth toe, right foot is cut open. Her left lung is broken. Her left lung is bruised. Her left kidney is broken. Her left false ribs are bruised. Her right lower leg is fractured. Her right lower leg is cut open. Her stomach is bruised. Her pancreas is bruised. Her spleen is bruised. Her right kidney is broken. Her right ankle is broken. Her left ankle is broken. Her right true ribs are broken. Her left lower arm is dripping. She is tall. Her hair is clean-shaven. Her somewhat long nose is narrow. Her nose bridge is slightly convex. Her right upper arm is gone. Her left lower arm is gone. Her teeth is gone. Her lower front teeth is gone. Her lower

14th of limestone, early autumn

The battle's lasted three whole days before they finally put an end to her. She didn't

die 'til they stabbed her through the heart from behind. It was awful...

```
Page 67/67 14th Limestone
>behind with her iron pike, tearing apart the muscle and fracturing the
heart!
'Stova' Amostemäth, Holistic Spawn Pikeman has been struck down.
```

The Master got wounded... bitten by her, in fact.

```
'The Master' Fikodnam, Pikedwarf
''The Master' Glazeddestined''

upper body
lower body           Stunned
head
right upper arm
left upper arm
right lower arm
left lower arm
right hand
left hand
right upper leg
left upper leg
right lower leg
left lower leg
right foot
left foot

g:Gen i:Inv p:Prf w:Wnd z:St
ESC: Done v: Next
```

I barged in on Splint afterwards, in his office - he said right quick that he didn't want to talk about it, but I got in his face and kept bugging him. He finally told me that when a Spawn bites somebody, they get infected with the demon's soul... and then that soul takes 'em over, if they're not strong enough to fight it. This is somethin' we're gonna have to watch for from now on... I only hope The Master doesn't wind up turnin' on us, too.

27th of limestone

It's been close to two weeks... I'm still trying to get over what happened... That image... the way she looked... her gaping body ripping limbs off of the human soldiers, devouring them, spitting them out, biting... oh, gods...

I'm starting a little mining project to the left of the bedroom area - hopefully we'll find some more ore. We absolutely need more iron to smelt - we need weapons. I haven't found any flux stone yet, but there's gotta be some somewhere... The miners say there might not be, but I'm holding out hope... against hope.



We've found a lot of other stuff, at least.

Page 2/2

27th Limestone, 201 rf Fortr

Stockpile: Job item misplaced.
 Mistêm Nokgolcerol, war Dog <Tame> has given birth to puppies.
 It is raining mountain barbarian blood!
 An animal has become a Stray war Dog.
 You have struck native gold!
 You have struck hematite!
 You have struck kaolinite!
 You have struck hematite!
 It is raining mountain barbarian blood!
 You have struck magnetite!
 You have struck lignite!
 You have struck tiger iron!
 'Nomia' Zatthudîton, Ranger cancels Train War Animal: No creature.

z: Zoom to location

Announcement Date: 27th Limestone, 201

6th of Sandstone

We got migrants! This is extremely good. Hopefully we can keep 'em around long enough to get everything going the way it's supposed to be. Some of our older migrants have had thoughts of leaving... I promised 'em things would get better - I

hope it weren't a flat-out lie.

Anyhow... I'm starting a little project. It's a set o' walls, they're going to keep enemies from getting to the fortress right away. They have to go through a curvy path to get there - long enough for us to be guaranteed able to close the gates.



23rd Sandstone

Here's the report on everything, thus far. 46 people in Spearbreakers, but strangely no children... They do say barbarians are child-stealers, so mebbe that's why we ain't seen any yet.

Hanlet Lokumokab, "Spearbreakers"									
Animals		Kitchen		Stone		Stocks		Health	
Created Wealth:		99490*		Population:		46			
Weapons:		4630*		Miners		4		Axe Lord	
Armor and Garb:		1800*		Woodworkers		3		Swordsdwarves	
Furniture:		10640*		Stoneworkers		1		Swordmasters	
Other Objects:		51038*		Rangers		1		Macedwarves	
Architecture:		19294*		Metalsmiths		1		Mace Lords	
Displayed:		8919*		Jewelers		2		Hammerdwarves	
Held/Worn:		3169*		Craftsdwarves		7		Hammer Lords	
Imported Wealth:		45206*		Nobles/Admins		5		Speardwarves	
Exported Wealth:		5995*		Peasants		1		Spear Masters	
Food Stores:		922		Dwarven Childrn		None		Marksdwarves	
Meat		188		Fishery Workers		3		Elite Mrksdwrvs	
Fish		43		Farmers		8		Wrestlers	
Plant		26		Engineers		3		Elite Wrestlers	
Seeds		332		Trained Animals		6		Recruit/Others	
Drink		226		Other Animals		51			
Other		107							

Anyhow, Juunya decided to start some secretive project... I only hope she designs somethin' for us we can actually use.

```

You have struck citrine!
The Stray Horse (Tame) has been slaughtered.
'Juunya' Ishdeler, Herbalist cancels Drink: Taken by mood.
→ 'Juunya' Ishdeler, Herbalist withdraws from society...

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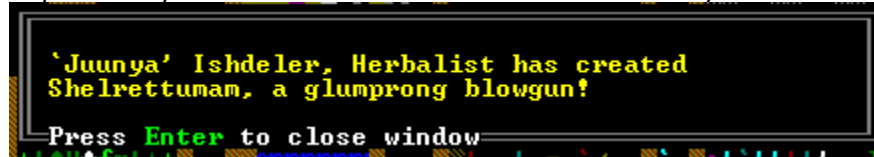
I've also started work on two more projects - over there on the left, you see my fancy artwork rendition of what our new archery room is going to look like - it's just a little ways off from the path that leads to the tower (bottom left). On the right... well, yeah, they still haven't dug the room for the new forges. It's been two months, for crying out loud!



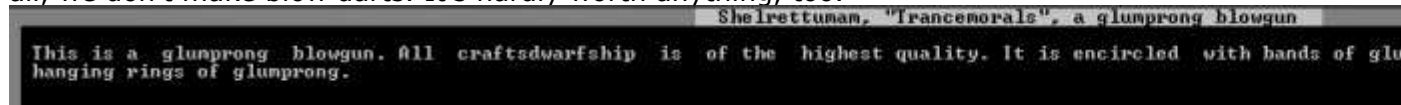
On a different matter, Fischer and Draigean are very unhappy... Fischer came to me and told me he wanted to know everything about the Spawn that I knew. I was forced to tell him - I didn't see any other option. He deserved to know. Apparently he also confided in Draigean... both of their moods have gone horribly down. I'm tryin' to figure out how to fix it.

7th Timber

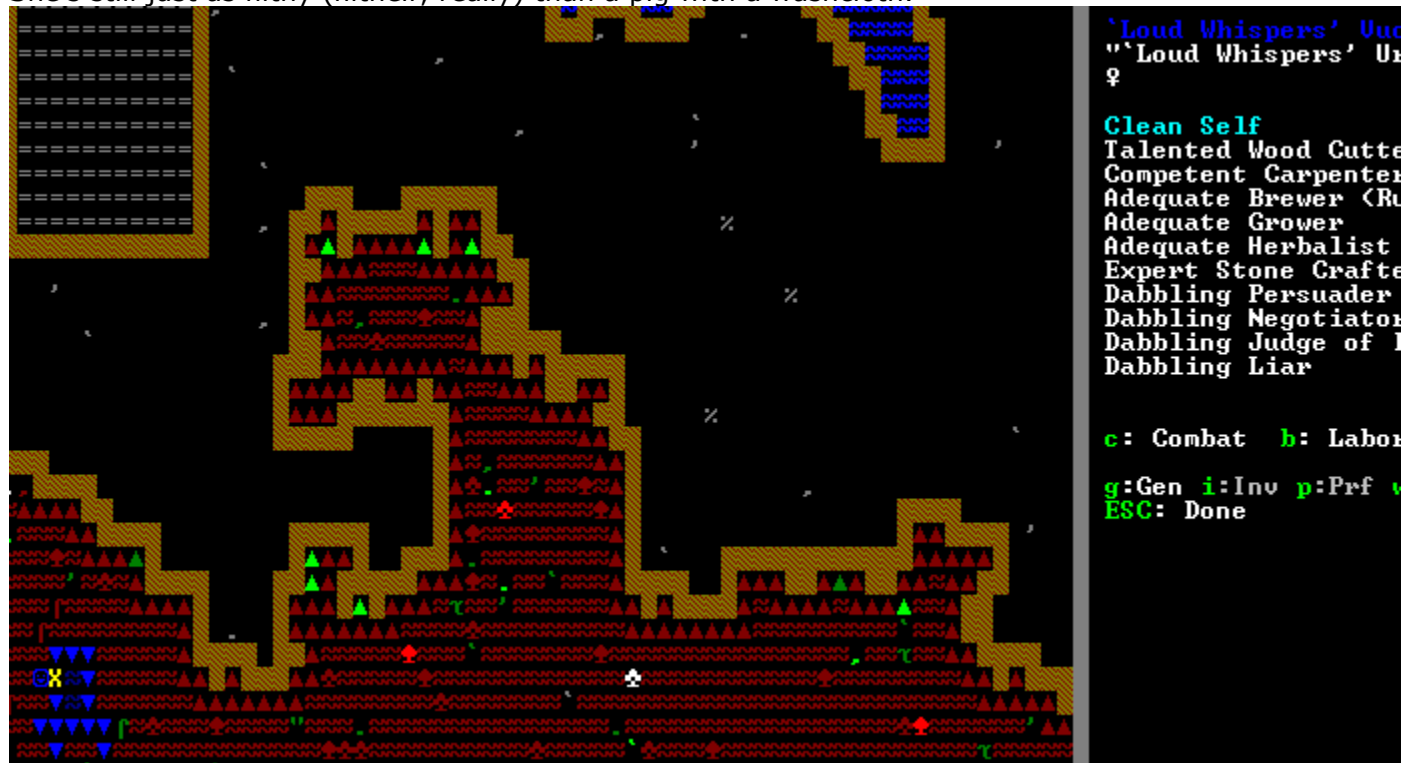
Yep... Juunya is an idiot. She made somethin' totally worthless to us.



Why? Why would you make a bunch o' dwarves somethin' like this? Come on, after all, we don't make blow darts. It's hardly worth anything, too.



It's apparently Dwarven STUPID Day. Loud Whispers (bottom left) decided to take a tromp through the mud and blood to get clean - and then tromp all the way back. She's still just as filthy (filtheir, really) than a pig with a washcloth.



I suppose the fact that she tends to avoid crowds might have somethin' to do with it... she bein' a private person, and the well always havin' people around it.

'Loud Whispers' Uucarlibad. "Loud Whispers' Urnpraise". Whispe

'Loud Whispers' Uucarlibad has been happy lately. She had a nice bath recently. She slept uneasily due to recently. She dined in a legendary dining room recently. She had a wonderful drink lately. She was caught in fr recently. She has been satisfied at work lately.

She is a citizen of the Responsible Outrampend Forest. She is a member of The Book of Strength. She arrived at Lab She is seventy-one years old, born on the 7th of Obsidian in the year 138.

She is tall. Her hair is clean-shaven. She has a broad chin. Her lips are slightly thick. Her nose is slightly nose bridge is somewhat concave. Her ears are free-lobed. Her skin is cinnamon.

She is really susceptible to disease.

'Loud Whispers' Uucarlibad likes basalt, zinc, schorl, the color beige, bucklers, turkeys for their speed and possible, she prefers to consume elephant, donkey cheese, sewer brew and tapir's milk. She absolutely detests large She has a stunning feel for spatial relationships and a good memory, but she has poor focus and a very bad sense of She occasionally overindulges. She tends to avoid crowds. She is assertive. She tends not to openly express others. She does not feel effective in life. She needs alcohol to get through the working day. She likes work weather.

A short, sturdy creature fond of drink and industry.

And guess what! The liason and wagons from the mountain home finally arrived!
We're in great luck! We're going to feast tonight!

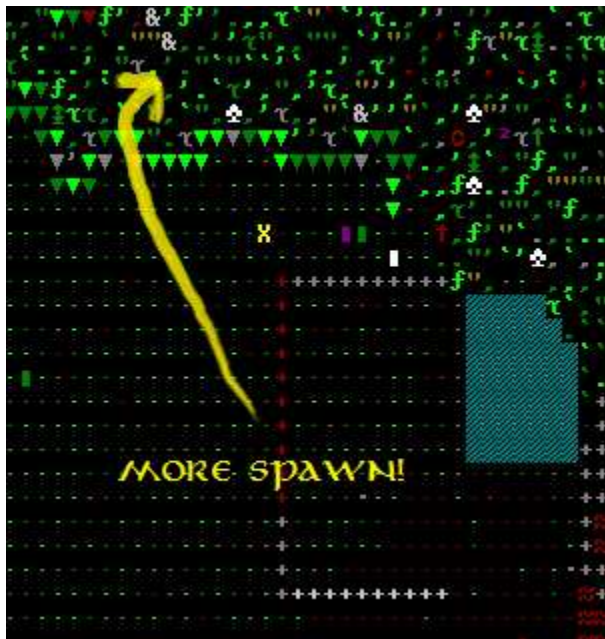


18th Timber

Spawn! An ambush! Oh, gods! Poor Nomia is out there - they found her! She doesn't stand a chance... I've ordered everyone inside - I'd raise the bridge, but the merchants still aren't inside yet! Fuggle, what do we do??



There were more out there than just that... One of our war dogs discovered a second ambush lying in wait. I have no idea what to do - I'm just going to have somebody raise the bridge. Whatever's out there can die, for all and whatnot. I don't care. I just want to live!



We raised the bridge, what little we have built of our outer wall defenses making it so the spawn just barely missed comin' in! If it hadn't been for those walls I put up, the whole ambush woulda made it inside. As it is now, they're all chasin' a little cat - Nomia's cat - they're going to slaughter it. But it's keepin' them away from us...



28th of timber

They're sittin' out there, mocking us... They know we can't keep the drawbridge up forever. There's at least fifty of them... okay, maybe more like fifteen or so... but they want us. They want our blood... gods, what do we do?



Pretending nothin' was wrong, I traded with the merchants. We got some booze, some weapons an' armor, and some meat. That was about it... They didn't have much we could use, and we lacked money. I sold a lot of my mechanisms, and a lot of Frog's masterpieces... he's actually a pretty smart dwarf, as far as dwarves go.

20th moonstone

It's been a month... I had to lower the bridge. I'd hoped that the merchant's escort would be able to take care of the Spawn. I was wrong... They're still fighting - on our bridge. One of the traders decided to make a run for it...



He didn't last long... they caught up with him easily. There are so many dead, but at least they took down a couple spawn with them.

23rd moonstone

They slaughtered all the escorts, an' everyone else in the caravan - nobody was left save one brave marksdwarf who refuses to leave his post. I ordered the bridge to be raised... I didn't care if we were trapped in here with some of them - I sent out our military to kill the spawn off. Fischer would know how to take care of them... Or so I thought...



Softa charged into battle first, her iron spear held firmly in her hand. She saw the monsters and briefly faltered, but charged onwards. She's hardly any more'n a recruit... how could she survive the damned? HARD followed close behind, wielding an iron pike. I felt for them... my gods, what have we done to come here?

With the spawn distracted by the marksdwarf from the mountainhome, Softa had the advantage of surprise, and stabbed the first creature repeatedly with her spear, though only in the leg. For the moment, we had the upper hand. HARD began stabbing another of the three demonic creatures - one of the thrusts piercing straight through the back of the Spawn's open mouth, and going through the back of the head. The spawn only smiled a terrifyingly hideous smile, spear still in it's mouth - a scene I'll remember to the day I die - and kicked HARD away from itself.

Draigneau, The Master, Gemblade and Obok Meatboy all rushed in as well, wielding their weapons. I prayed that we'd survive this unscathed. I wanted desperately to talk to Splint - as if he knew the solution. I knew he didn't, but where was he?

My gods... Oh, these evil memories... The spawn, one of them was missing every single limb, and yet it lived, somehow managing to move like an inchworm towards Draigneau's leg. He saw it in time, stabbing it in the head - but nothing happened.

The Master charged bravely into the battle, stabbing one of them through the body, then through the cheek, then through the head with his beloved wooden pike - and the spawn turned, spear still lodged through the skull, and bit The Master hard on the upper leg - hard enough to cause the blood to gush. oh, gods, he was dying right there in front of me and there was nothing I could do! He was struggling to his feet, and the spawn bit him in the arm instead, literally taking away a chunk of the flesh. with the spear still lodged through its head, the spawn continued to bite The Master - and the monster didn't even have any arms.

Obok Meatboy was bitten soon after... he fought bravely, though. Softa was bitten three times at least, in the lower body, and both her right arm and foot. Then, for some reason, Obok Meatboy and Draigneau fled from the battle, screaming, terror in their eyes. I yelled for them to return... knowing full well it could be their death sentence. I feel such deep guilt for that, but what choice did I have? Even so, they refused to come back.



Gemblade remained unharmed at first, stabbing and attacking anything evil within reach, roarin' like a madman. The Master was down with serious injuries by this time... By the gods, it was horrifying to watch... I couldn't e'en find the strength within me to scream in terror. Gemblade went down right afterwards... The spawn were biting him viciously... He managed to struggle to his feet, and he fled for his life. What are these beasts, that can invoke such terror?

By this point, HARD was the only one still on his feet... And he had actually slain one of them. Fischer was missing... I have no idea where he was, but he certainly wasn't at the battle. The Master fled as well - all our brave soldiers running from their lives, when they outnumbered the enemy two to one. Ashsaber managed to stab one of them a few times before being bitten, and then he too ran.

At this point, Feb rushed into the battle, wielding a pitchblende warhammer. He managed to knock off the arm of one of them with a lucky swing, but he got bitten as well. it's unnerving to watch these monsters... They coil themselves almost like a snake, leaping towards their victims, hideously sharp teeth bared... And their chests... gods... Oh, gods help us. Feb killed one of them, and rushed back towards HARD, who had been bitten a few times already. There was another Spawn there - I

have no idea where it came from - perhaps as had happened with Stova, one of our allies had transformed. Whatever the case, both remaining Spawn were missing their arms and feet, and were walking around on stubs for legs - and makin' it look easy as natural.

Somehow, the two warriors, HARD and Feb, managed to destroy the two beasts by themselves - Feb mightily swinging his pitchblende warhammer, and HARD stabbing everything with his pike. There was blood everywhere - the dwarves themselves were covered with it - and nothing remained of the mountainhome's trading expedition.

There was one Spawn stuck on a ledge, though... not sure what we're gonna do about him. And the other spawn - a group of about seven or so - are still hangin' around, just out of reach of crossbowshot. We can't lower the bridge. There were severed limbs and teeth everywhere around the depot... It'll take a month or more to clean. But we survived... we survived an ambush with only one casualty.



16th opal, 201, midwinter

We still can't lower the bridge... The spawn are hangin' around still (bottom left), and in the meantime, there's miasma all around the depot. I've had dwarves workin' fulltime on the corpses and bodyparts, but it's still not done. Not only that...



My "genius" refuse stockpile is full. I don't know what to do here. I need to quit... but I can't just abandon everybody. gods, I'm going to lose my mind...



There are four dwarves in the hospital still - Draigneane, Obok Meatboy, Gemblade, and The Master. Our doc, Simon Tam, is takin' good care of 'em all, though. I hope they don't turn...

28th opal, 201, midwinter

We found Fischer! Turns out I'd locked him in the armory somehow... probably while I was tryin' to keep the soliers from fleeing...

Anyhow, we're goin' to expand the refuse stockpile. We need it a lot larger... we don't really have any way to dump stuff outside anymore. This is the best I can do. Miasma is all through the fortress now... It's a mess, everyone is complaining. Some people are miserable.



9th obsidian, 201, late winter

Momuz has gone berserk! Our butcher, Momuz, finally decided he had enough, and started trying to kill everyone. Fortunately we managed to get there before he caused any real harm... sad, though... we had to kill him. And Nomia's body is still out there on the hill... that's two dwarves dead from this madness.



13th obsidian

Feb's been taken by a fey mood. I begged him to make something useful for us, but he wouldn't talk about what he was doing - he said it wasn't open for discussion.



23rd Obsidian

...He made us a mug. A MUG. I swear, I'm tired of mugs. I've seen 'em everywhere, I've seen too many. I can't take the doggone things anymore! They're ugly, disgusting... (no offense to you, Miss Bombzero) Ugh. Anyhow, Feb proudly bragged that his mug was worth 16800 coppers. However, he was outraged when I suggested we sell it... so, worth a lot or not, it's still worthless. Looks like he just wanted to be able to drink his enemies, maybe?

Nisün Gethor, "The Warning of Dirges", a gypsum mug
This is a gypsum mug. All craftedwarfship is of the highest quality. It is encrusted with round gypsum cabochons, spawn bone and encircled with hands of oval gypsum cabochons.

At least the spawn have left...



27th of Obsidian

I can't take no more. I gotta get me a nice beer and a room to sleep in...my nice cavy room... How I miss my cavies... oh, gods, what if the spawn got to a cavy... oh, gods...

I spoke to Splint and he said if I thought it 'd be best for me to retire, it pro'lly would be. I've given leadership over to Mr. Frog - he seems the most capable here, and he's a mechanic same as me. I'm sure he'll do a great job... I just want me a cavy. I asked him nicely to maybe buy one for me... I dunno if he will, tho'...

Anyhow, I'm givin' him this journal, too.. He deserves to know all that's gone on. I only hope he won't go addleheaded from it all...

Hamlet Lokumokab, "Spearbreakers"									
Animals		Kitchen		Stone		Stocks		Health	
Created Wealth:		161518*		Population:		45			
Weapons:		17000*		Miners		4		Axe Lord	
Armor and Garb:		1800*		Woodworkers		3		Axe Lords	
Furniture:		13780*		Stoneworkers		1		Swordsdwarves	
Other Objects:		74846*		Rangers		1		Swordmasters	
Architecture:		38301*		Metalsmiths		1		Macedwarves	
Displayed:		10052*		Jewelers		2		Mace Lords	
Held/Worn:		5739*		Craftsdwarves		7		Hammerdwarves	
Imported Wealth:		57256*		Nobles/Admins		6		Hammer Lords	
Exported Wealth:		5995*		Peasants		None		Speardwarves	
Food Stores:		1110		Dwarven Childrn		None		Spearmasters	
Meat		163		Fishery Workers		2		Marksdwarves	
Fish		29		Farmers		4		Elite Mrksdwrvs	
Plant		41		Engineers		3		Wrestlers	
				Trained Animals		5		Elite Wrestlers	
				Other Animals		46		Recruit/Others	

Oh, and afore I forget, Mr. Frog - Nomia's ghost was seen roamin' around Spearbreakers... ya might wanna watch out for it.

[[Talvieno's note: The following comment spawned (no pun intended) a huge discussion about how the world could possibly still exist. Later on this issue would mostly dissolve. The final conclusion was that Parasol (an interdimensional company from Syrupleaf) sent the entire world back in time and put Syrupleaf in stasis to appease Armok. It's still unclear who or what re-released the Spawn.]]

(The Master): Just an FYI, since we're officially in the same universe as Headshoots and Syrupleaf, I'd like to point out a GIGANTIC flaw in the logic. In the end of the Syrupleaf story, the world basically became an obsidian boulder in space, as everything was covered in lava. Holistic was destroyed by the god of Treachery(I think that's the name). The gods left the universe. You might want to think of a way around this.

(Talvieno): We went back in time and changed the past. Masterwork Dwarven Time Machine Artifact. Menaces with spikes of carbon fiber, aerogel and plutonium. Enjoy.

(Mr Frog): Yeah, pretty much the first thing I did during planning was point that little bit of continuity out to Splint. He didn't seem to care much, and it wasn't really a big deal so I didn't make it a big deal.

(Talvieno): Possibly Spearbreakers is set before Syrupleaf? OR... it was all just myth. After all, how could it have been recorded if nobody was left?

(Mr Frog): Through the magic of the omniscient narrator 😊
Splint actually floated this theory to me; basically, people did survive, and the reason the story said that the whole world was magma'd was that, to the people telling it, Everoc was the whole world.

MITCHEWAWA:

Journal of Mitch, Galena 201

Holy shit.

[[Talvieno's note: This was quoted a thousand times through the thread.]]

(Talvieno): Very well said.

Here's my theory on what happened: Holistic and her crew dug down to the mantle, released the lava, yada yada, everything burns, blah blah blah, *BUT!* The dwarf narrating everything is trapped in a little (insert magma-safe stone here) tower near Syrupleaf. The magma raises to the top of the tower (fortunately the windows are made out of obsidian cabochons or something), turns to obsidian, and *to the narrator* it looks like, for all the world, that the world is covered with obsidian. Being locked away in the pitch-black tower for the rest of his miserably short life would more or less make it feel pretty natural to assume that the gods had abandoned the planet for good.

ASHSABER:

Journal of Ash -

I've heard the stories about Syrupleaf, about the dreaded spawn of holistic, about how they're strong enough to rip a dwarf to pieces, about how freakishly fast they are, and how ridiculously hard they are to kill.

I've never heard about how if they bite you, YOU TURN INTO THEM.

Wonder if we can get some marksdwarves to cover us the next time we fight? I mean, bolts are like little spears, right? They'll still work n'stuff?

Oh Armok, what if that blood that's raining down will turn us into spawns too.
[scribbles]

SUS:

From the journal of 'Sus' Bibandeler, Miner

I did somethin' today that I haven' done in a long time: went to take a look outside.

The soldiers are sayin' there's some kind o' ungodly horror trapped right next to the bridge out there... Wanted to see what all that ruckus was about.

By the Gods, I'd completely forgotten how awful it is on the surface. So Armok-damn bright! And the sky... I don' know how the woodcutters stand to look at all that gaping, open void all day. And then there's the infernal howlin' they call "wind". Made me shudder.

As for the ...creature... that was standin' there behind that pit... I don' think I'll be sleepin' anytime soon. It kinda looks like it used to be a 'dorf, but now it's anything but. It had unnaturally long, spindly arms and legs with claws like a bunch of sickles. But the worst... the worst part was the chest. It was torn wide open from neck to groin, gnashing like some kind of unholy maw. The shattered ribs and sternum jutted out from the sides like jagged, coarse teeth. And the wailing... what's with the wailing? No creature born of the Gods can make a noise such as that.

*I need me a drink o' some extra strength brandy.
A **big** drink.*

[[Talvieno's note: This post was made later in the thread.]]

MITCHEWAWA:

Journal of Mitch, Obsidian 20

*The Spawn, oh it had to be the **Spawn**.*

There have been many questions passed across the dining room table. 'What are the Spawn?' 'If the fables are true, why does our planet exist?'. They think that perhaps the world didn't collapse, or that the great tome explaining the downfall of the world was a lie, conceived by false gods. Perhaps the Spawn have succeed in separating the Dwarven race, just as they did in the black, decaying scar on the world that was Headshoots. But I know.

*My pappy used to be a priest and philosopher. He told me many stories about the Spawn; about Headshoots and the downfall of the world. They must be made to see that Armok isn't just a God, he is the god of Gods. The... lesser Gods can affect our world, yes. Curses, abominations, life and death. They are the overseers of our world. But Armok... Armok is different. He isn't interested in our praise, he is interested in **schadenfreude**. His '!!Fun!!', as the great oracles of the world tell us. And when a world loses its interest, its '!!Fun!!', it is reforged in his Great Smithy. Not just the world though, the Glorious Pantheon of Gods too. All are at the whim of Armok. They are all a game for him to watch. The planet that Headshoots occupied (the name has been lost to history), was burnt to a crisp; a desolate husk of a planet. And Armok wiped the slate clean in his Smithy of the stars, and a new world was forged. Our world. The world of Spearbreakers, as it seems. The world of Headshoots is long gone, and like a phoenix ours rises from its ashes.*

But what are the Spawn? The malevolence of Armok? Or perhaps the soul of the

wicked Holistic, twisted by demonic influence, was strong enough to **duel** Armok in control of the universe? There are many theories, but no one knows the answer. But what we do know is they are the enemy of life. And where there is conflict, there is shadenfreude, there is !!Fun!!

But a **plague** of Spawn? This is new. Unprecedented. Perhaps Holistic is getting stronger through the conquest of Headshoots' world. All we can do is try not to get bitten.

SPLINT:

26th Obsidian, 201 Interim entry.

They took on our ragtag band of soldiers and we won, but our victory was costly. An entire caravan was lost and nearly all our soldiers were injured. The only light in this was Stova's hammers proved quite effective, killing one of the foul creatures. Momuz decided to flip shit, and that ended as badly for him as you'd expect. If I heard right, Nomia and her cat were killed as well. And the best part? I have a fucking monstrosity sitting outside my gate spooking everyone.

And I hope Frog will put it to good use training support troops, who I shall see if Frog can put together from the spring migrants, if any come at all.

And if anyone doesn't have any business concerning the fortress as a whole comes barging into my office while I collect my thoughts cataloging ores and stones and all the new leftovers, I swear to Ast I will crush their skulls with one of Stova's hammers. But if they come back I'll be happy to take the fight to them. To destroy them for what they've done.

They took my lover and want my home, and I'll be happy to take their lives. - A picture follows in dimple dye of a glowing pitchblende hammer. Around it is the word vengeance ad infinitum across the page.

MR FROG:

You pick a leather-bound journal up off the ground. From the looks of it, it has seen quite a bit of use. Odd smudges which you can't quite identify cover its surface. There was something written on it, perhaps the name of its original owner, but it has been hastily smudged out; written next to it in a substance which may or may not be dwarven blood is the name 'Mr Frog'.

You open the journal...

27 Obsidian 201

Talvieno has apparently decided to entrust the continued operation of Spearbreakers

to me for a time. Looking back on her comments in this journal, she appears to think very highly of me for some reason. I can't help but question her judgment in this regard, but I'm personally not complaining.

In spite of the recent attack by the Spawn of Holistic, things are remarkably calm. Everybody's reasonably happy and nobody's died or gone insane for at least a month.

There are some things that could stand to be addressed, though.

For example, with the drawbridge now up, the traders at the depot currently have no way of exiting our fortress. I'm somewhat worried about the state of trading next autumn if they all go insane from extended confinement. Unfortunately, I don't think it'd be a good idea to open our fort up right now. For reasons that I will explain later, our military likely is going to spend the better part of the next few months forcibly confined indoors, and it wouldn't really be fair to let the other dwarves look upon the wonders of our corpse-strewn barbarian-bloodbath while they're cooped up inside, now, would it?

On that note, one of our squads has apparently been set to train next to the depot, with the aforementioned bits and blood and boulders. I don't really know why, but I'd like to.



[[Talvieno's note: For those who wonder, this texture pack was created by Mr Frog.]]

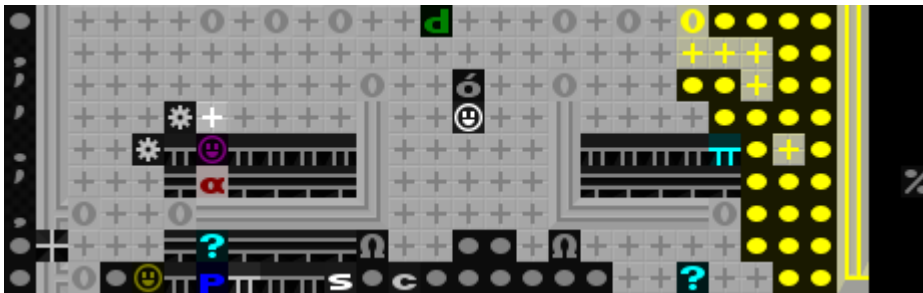
Also, I'm a bit worried about our food stores – it seems that the previous overseers had not seen fit to plant anything other than plump helmets. It hasn't been proven, but it might yet turn out to be possible to become sick of wine.

The greatest tragedy of all, however, is the fact that dear, sweet Talvieno apparently spelled my name wrong on the census sheet! There is *no* period in my name, imbeciles!

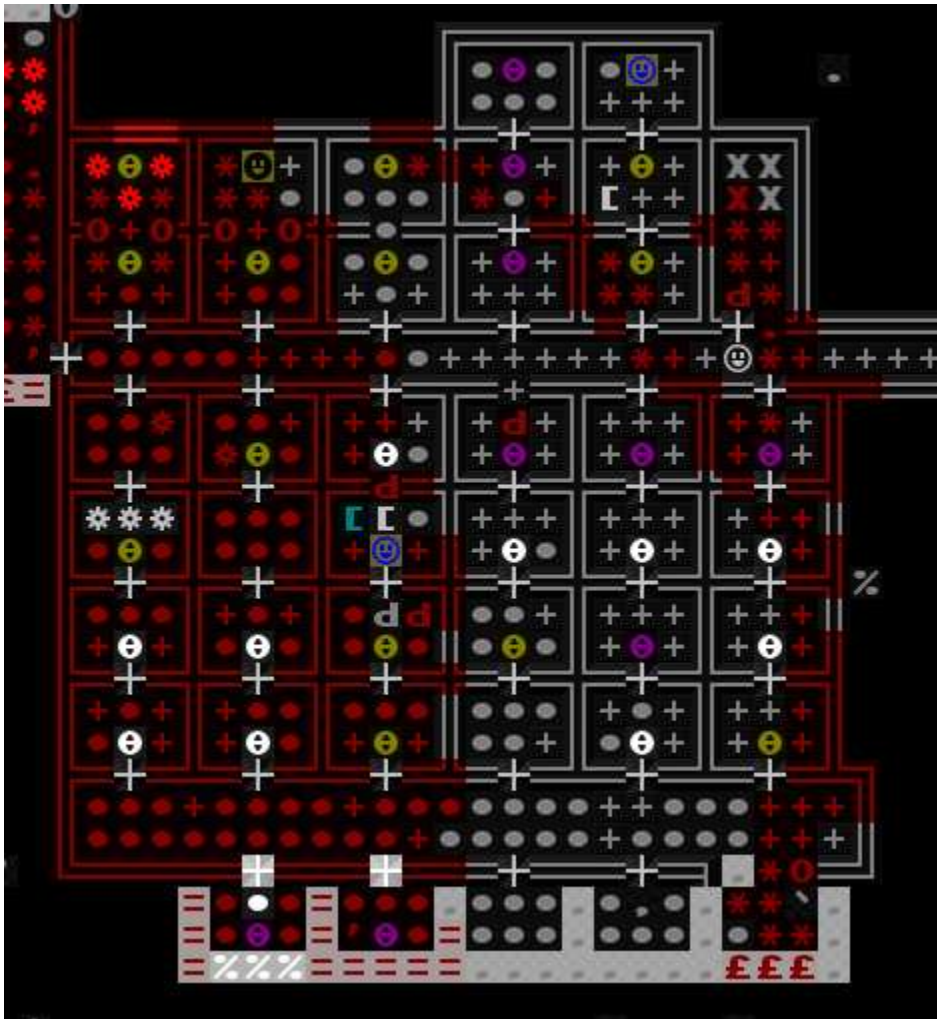


Typically, I would respond to an insult of this caliber by dangling the offending party by their testicles over a pit of angry badgermen; however, as Talvieno is female, I don't think it would be worth the effort in this case. As such, I'm going to let this blithe attack on my name – my identity – my very **SOUL** -- slide. I'm watching you, though, Talvieno.

That aside, there are some other aspects of the construction which confuse me.

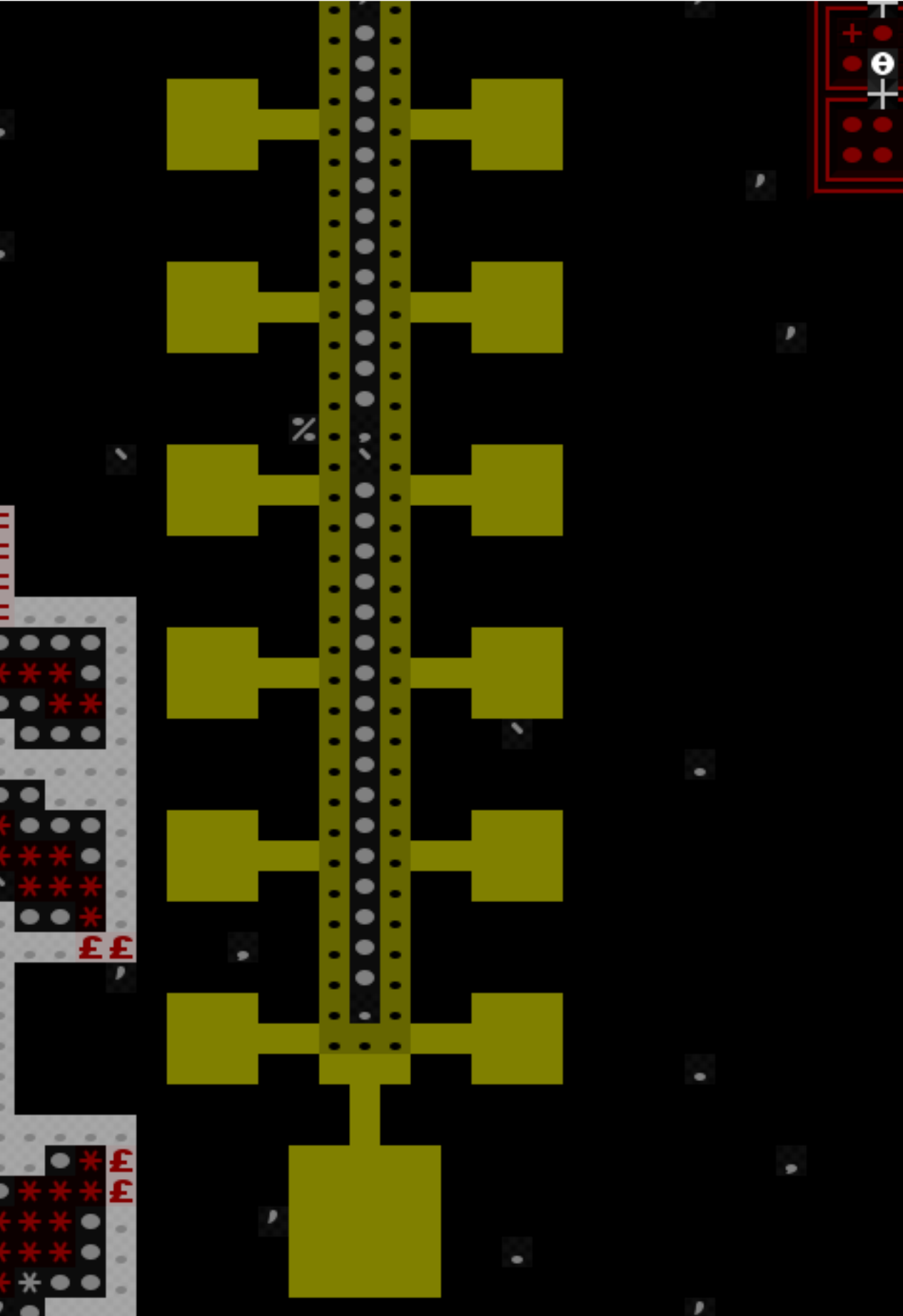


Sitting here in the dining hall is a lever. I have no idea what it does. I *think* it operates the bridge, but that's only because that's the only thing that it would make sense to be linked to, and I frankly think relying on something to make sense in this crazy three-legged pony rodeo we call life is a bit naïve. I'd love to pull it and find out, but if it does turn out to operate the bridge, then by extension the bridge would be lowered. Again, I'd like to avoid that if at all possible.



Our previous overseers apparently decided that we're too good to be subjected to the indignity of a communal bedroom, and as such had devoted labour and resources towards lovingly carving each dwarf a nice little bedroom of their own. I can't say I agree with this decision. We're all brothers (and sisters) here, and said labour and resources would probably have been better spent making armour so that our military would look nice.

On that note, here's where the military will be staying for the next few months instead of going outside into the sunshine and bloody rain:



They're quarantine cells. They haven't been dug out yet, obviously, but this is the basic design. The military dwarves are to be sealed inside in case they end up turning into Spawn. From what Talvieno indicated in her report, almost all of them were injured in the previous attack. They seem to have healed up okay, though, so they should survive to be of service to us for now.

Of course, there will need to be something to prevent the quarantined from escaping; to that end, I have ordered the production of 15 floodgates in 3 sets of 5. Splint will be finalizing the orders shortly:

```
Work Orders
Construct rock Floodgate
Construct rock Floodgate
Construct rock Floodgate
```

Happily, I have already produced far more mechanisms than is required for this task:

boxes and bags	7	51	shale
bins	40	16	pitch
barrels	83	21	
buckets	23	8	
mechanisms	74	21	
trap components	None	2	
flasks	1	4	
goblets	529	94	

Though the fact somebody had apparently constructed a mechanism entirely out of pitchblende worries me somewhat.

We have to hurry with this. The attacks happened roughly around mid-winter, and live testing with the Spawn suggested an incubation period of approximately 3.6 months after being bitten – I'm not at liberty to reveal how, exactly, I know that, however.

It took me a *ridiculously* long time to find the mason's shops so that I could cancel whatever orders they currently had so that they could focus on making floodgates. In the end, I had to ask a passing dwarf for directions. I did manage to find them, though, and suspended all current operations.

Also, I noticed that one of our miners – i.e. the people who we need to dig out the quarantine chambers which need to be finished as soon as dwarvenly possible – had apparently been assigned to smelt iron. I told him to stop, though I'd like to know why such a critical worker was asked to divide his labour in the first place. I'm sure there was a good reason, but I'm at a loss to think of one right now.



I'd also like to point out that our current forge operations are frankly pathetic. Only one wood furnace, smelter, and forge isn't nearly enough for our needs. I'll have to make arrangements later; I'll get it fixed up.

I also went around and told some nonessential workers that they were now masons until further notice. It went fairly well – I only got punched twice. On that note, I cancelled the planned construction of a siege workshop (not sure what the previous overseers had been thinking, as we have no siege engineers) and ordered the construction of several mason's shops in its place.



Irritatingly, right when we need something to be dug out quickly, half of our mining force decides that now would be an excellent time to not do anything:

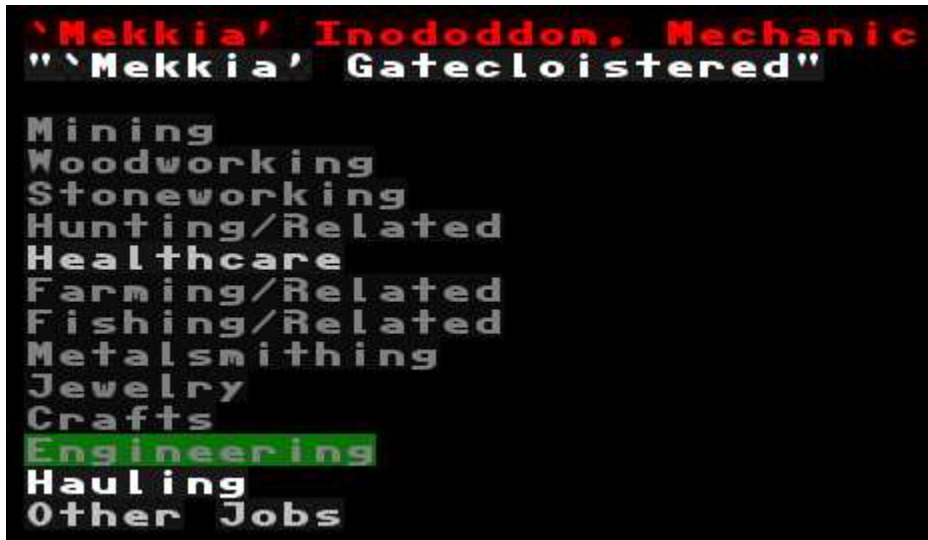
'Sus' Bibandeler, Miner	Dig
'Rodge' Zuntîrdùstik, Miner	On Br
'Bombzero' Tistaangir, Miner	Dig
'Rochia' Fikods&kzul, Miner	On Br

It is now New Year's Eve. Spring has begun, and with it, work on the quarantine cells.

2 Granite 202

Once again, I see that important workers have been assigned to perform inane tasks. Talvieno was rendering fat when she could have been helping construct levers for the quarantine cells.

Additionally, Mekkia, the so-called mechanic, had apparently not been set to perform *any* engineering-related labours:



I'm sure that it was just an honest mistake, however -- an easily-corrected mistake at that. I hope I won't be seeing any other honest mistakes like this anytime soon.

3 Granite 202

The miners are making excellent progress on the cells. Additionally, the first batch of floodgates is now ready to be installed. I'm very happy to see that everybody's working so quickly.

12 Granite 202

Perhaps I spoke too soon... only one cell of fifteen is operational at the moment. I hope they're completed in time. I'd hate to end up short on rooms.

Of course, even in the face of potential crisis, one must always take time to relax:



18 Granite 202

Several quarantine cells are now complete. Draigean, The Master, Feb, HARD, and Shaftirons have been assigned to solo squads and ordered to enter. When they asked me why I had asked them to remove their weapons and armour, I told them that I had arranged for a highly-attractive courtesan of their preferred gender to be delivered directly to their cells, and that them showing up to find their client armed

to the teeth would likely leave a bad impression. I don't think they really bought it, but they certainly seemed more willing to enter their cells afterwards (The Master was still reluctant, but then Talvieno came in and said something about wood polish or something and he went skipping inside).

Also, I've spotted some migrants outside using the surveillance devices which I surreptitiously set up when I came. There are about 5 or 6 in all. I'm still not comfortable with lowering the gate – that Spawn stuck up on the ledge is making me nervous – so they'd better get comfortable out there while we get everything sorted out in here.

20 Granite 202

One of the yaks in the trade depot went berserk. Fortunately, the ridiculous amount of doors on the first floor made it very easy to lock the animal out. Apparently, there was another trader and yak still at the depot, but they should be able to sort it out for themselves.

It doesn't look like the quarantine chambers will be finished in time. As such, I'm going to have begin preparations for my plan B:



The hospital isn't getting much use at the moment anyways.

Also:

Mistêm Nokgolcerol. war Dog (Tame) has given

Puppies! 🐶

22 Granite 202

The other yak is now running around gibbering. No, I don't know how it's gibbering

when it can't even speak in the first place. It just is. Also:

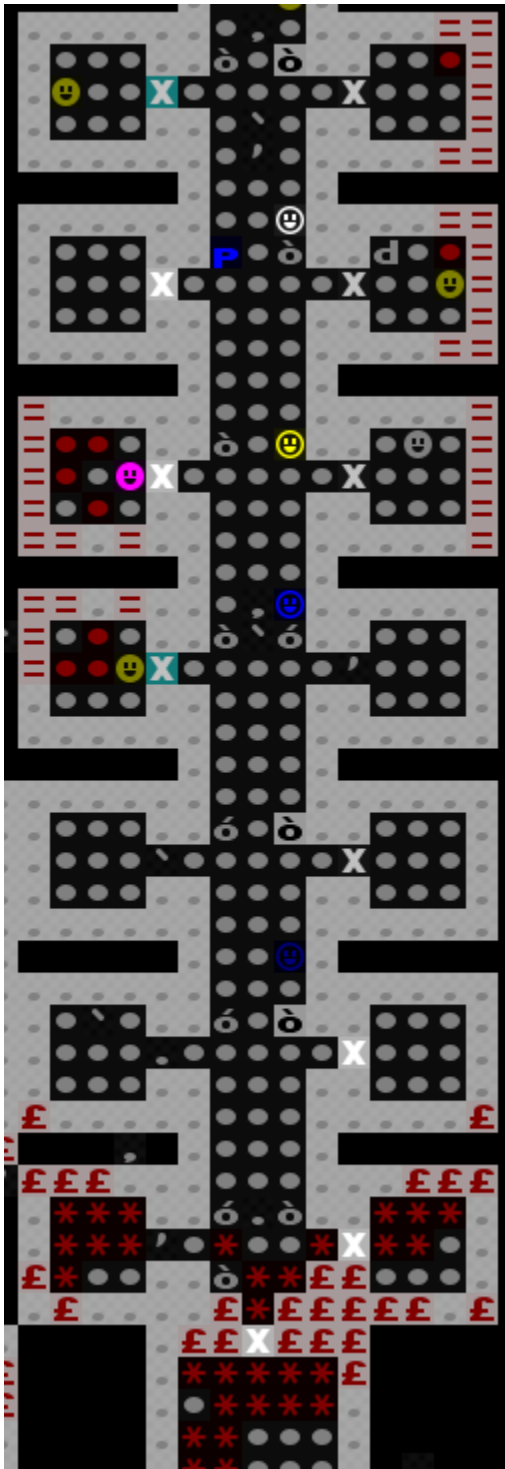


It appears that I may not have sealed the depot doors quite as completely as I had thought.

Fortunately, it appears that the yaks can still be contained. The amount of doors in the upper floor is as amazing as it is disturbing.

24 Granite 202

Interesting... the yaks just went back down through the doors to the trade depot, and I *know* I locked those behind them. I just ordered the construction of a strategically-placed dwarven-built wall. I'd like to see them circumvent *that*.



All but one of the 5 previously-mentioned dwarves have been locked safely inside their cells. The sound of the floodgates slamming shut behind them could be heard echoing throughout the fortress.

Three more chambers have been completed; Fischer, Obok Meatboy and Ashsaber have been ordered to go inside, where they will be sealed until we know whether it's safe to let them out.

...I need a drink.

26 Granite 202



I appear to have accidentally cut Splint off from the rest of the fortress when I ordered that wall to be built (why his office is *there*, of all places, is beyond me). Fortunately, he doesn't appear to be harmed and some miners are coming to dig him out. Once he's out, I'm going to have to get some masons in to block off that doorway in his private dining room (Why does *he* get a private dining room? And *why* is it dug out of soil? Those worms crawling in through the walls almost put me off my wine).

1 Slate 202

I'm getting anxious about the time – I've sealed the remaining military inside the hospital. It shouldn't be too much of a problem – there are beds, and it's not like they'll be waiting alone, right? Really, it's more like a slumber party than a quarantine.

Before I sealed them in, another cell was completed. I ordered Softa to go inside it:

```
`Softa' Omristlikot, Wrestler
"Softa' Wildinks"

upper body
lower body
head
right upper arm
left upper arm
right lower arm
left lower arm
right hand
left hand
right upper leg
left upper leg
right lower leg
left lower leg
right foot
left foot

Fever

g:Gen i:Inv p:Prf w:Wnd z:St
ESC: Done
```

Again, I'm not allowed to reveal how I know this, but the final phase of the Spawn infection before the victim potentially turns is marked by a rising fever in the victim. If the data we got from the research is correct, Softa has up to about half a month before we know whether she's safe or not.

Results from the tests had been inconclusive -- some tests showed a 100% rate of transformation, while others suggested that the rate was as low as 10%.

She'll be okay, I think. It's probably just a flu or something.

6 Slate 202

Ashsaber has become feverish as well. I let her out of the group confinement just before the wall was put up and assigned her to a cell that was just completed.

I've noticed that Juunya appeared to have escaped confinement, but as she doesn't appear to have sustained any injuries – Spawn-related or otherwise – I've decided to let her remain free.



Here she is, drinking to her own health -- a true example of dwarven spirit.

14 Slate 202

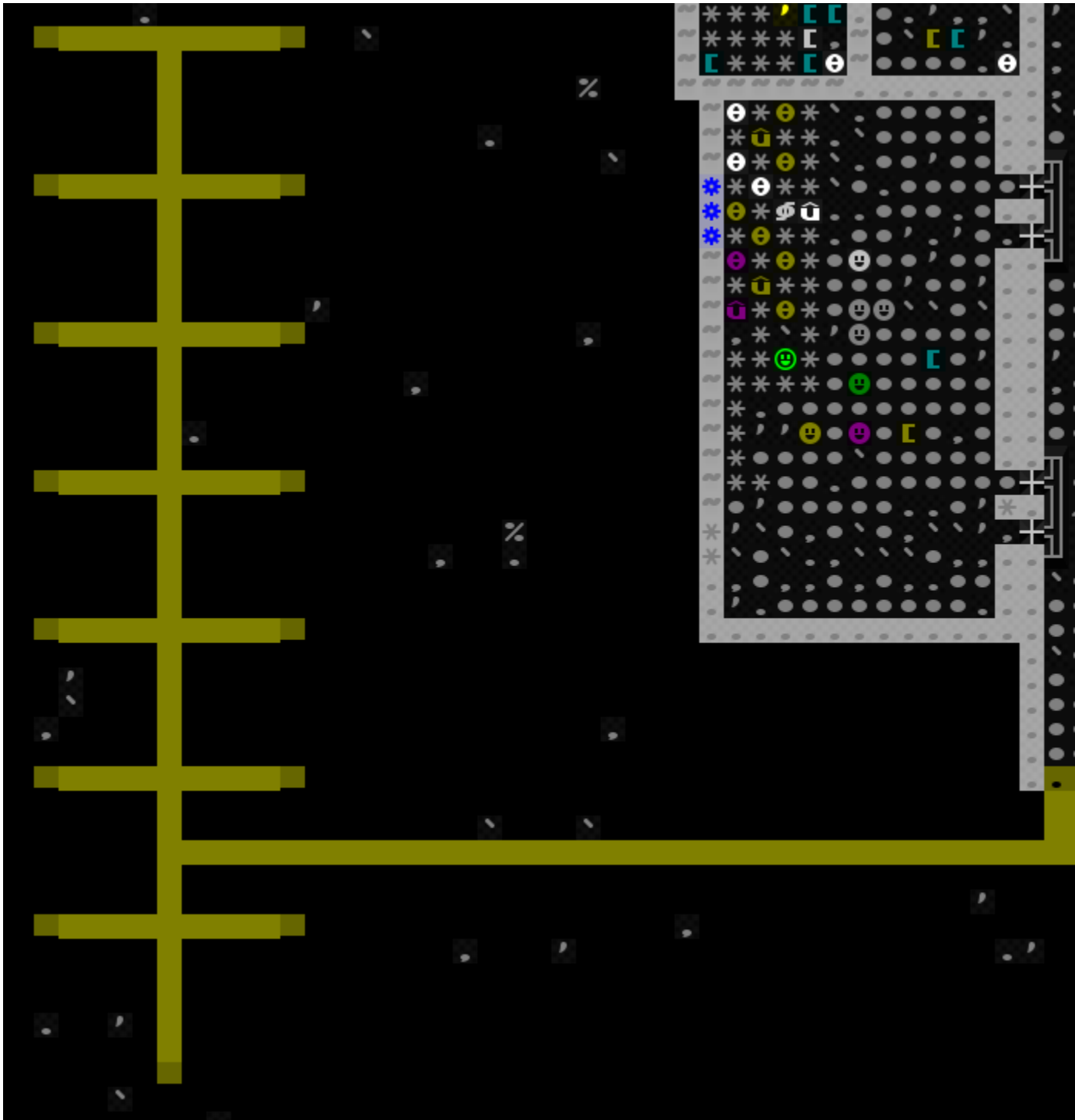
Today, I am a witness to an event which I had hoped never to have to have been a part of for the rest of my days.

→ 'Softa' Omristlikot, sergeant has transform

Oh, Armok... I'm having flashbacks...

Fortunately, the floodgates seem to be holding... not that I had any reason to think that they wouldn't. The tests showed that this new breed of the Spawn were somewhat weaker than their forbearers, and not capable of the acts of wide-scale property destruction that had ravaged the various Syrupleafs. Then again, these Spawn are more clever. I wouldn't put it past them to figure out a way to work the gates open.

Some of the quarantined are complaining of thirst (also, The Master's been crying endlessly about his "woody" -- whatever that is), so I've arranged for supply shafts to be dug so that we can drop supplies down to them:

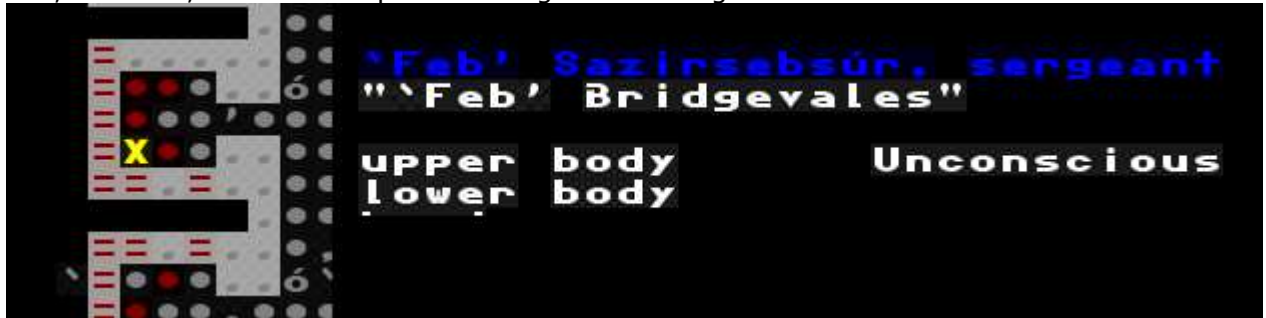


The channels line up with the quarantine cells on the floor below. Now our most important workers won't die from dehydration.

Also, one of the military imprisoned in the hospital is apparently Very Unhappy. Something about noisy conditions waking her up. I say it's her own fault for actually trying to sleep at a slumber party.

In much brighter news, it turns out that Talvieno's reports of the carnage last winter may not have been entirely correct – I just checked the status of the imprisoned, and several of them appear not to have sustained any injuries of any sort. Feb, Shaftirons, Fischer, and HARD have all been released from quarantine, after which the latter three all punched me in the face in sequence – how rude!

Feb, however, had more important things to be doing:



Sleeping like a rock. Those cells must be even comfier than I thought.

I'm still seeing various lovely images flashing before my eyes every time I blink... I think more alcohol is in order.

15 Slate 202

I had horrible nightmares last night.

However, they paled in comparison to what I woke up to:

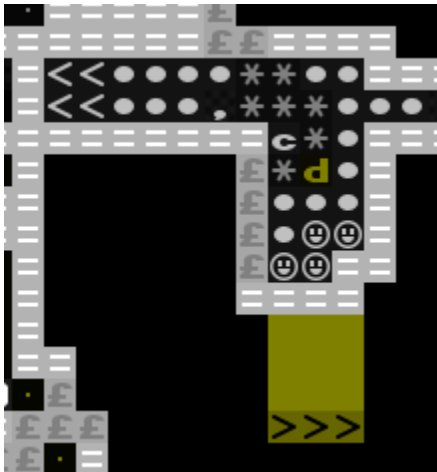
→ 'Ashsaber' Othilvutok, sergeant has transfo

The two's screeches reverberate throughout the halls. I think they're talking to each other, though the tests had been inconclusive on that point.

It's so nice that they have each other now, at least. I'd hate to be alone in such a situation.

...I think I'm gonna need more wine.

In any case, I want our military to have a better equipment selection when they come out, and our wood-based forges are far too inefficient (besides, wood is for beds, barrels, and jamming under the fingernails of people who misspell my name), so I've ordered the miners to dig down and not to stop until either they hit magma or magma hits them:



21 Slate 202

We have hit the magma sea!

Or, more specifically, we have dug into a section of a cavern with a particularly nice view of the sea through a nearby magma pool.

I quickly had the cavern breach blocked off and ordered the miners to continue digging down. They finally hit the magma sea proper, and discover *this*:

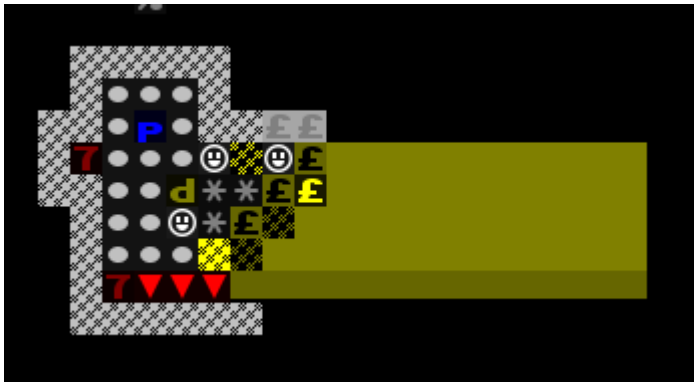


Naturally, several of the miners literally started to drool at this point.

Of course, while I'm fairly certain that there are no Greater Spawn remaining in this iteration (testing this hypothesis empirically had been unanimously vetoed, however, for obvious reasons), I still don't think it'd be a good idea to disturb the critters

underneath. They get very upset whenever someone intrudes on their domain. As pretty as it is, it's probably best to leave it untouched.

26 Slate 202



Work on the new forge level has begun. I've ordered the deconstruction of the old forge, as we'll need that anvil to get the new forges started.

It appears that the berserk yak died at some point – I'm guessing the gibbering yak kicked it in the head in self-defence, or perhaps in an involuntary muscle spasm. This means that we can now safely access the depot. I've ordered the wall to be torn down. Once it's gone, we can start to work on the new entrance, which will not have a Spawn on a ledge screeching at everybody who passes by.

Draigneau's frantic begging for food has become a lot fainter lately:



So I've arranged for a present to be dropped in through the shafts. Because I care.

(Draigneau likes dog pancreas, right? I'd hate to have gotten it wrong.)

28 Slate 202

The depot has been unsealed, and so the plans for the new entrance have been drawn up:



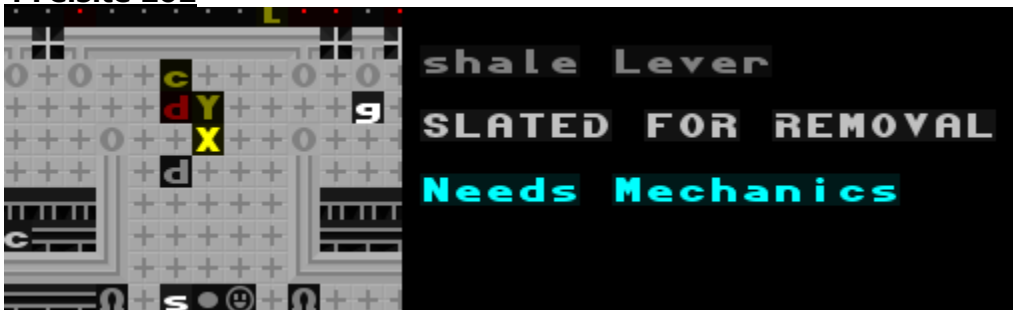


The little room coming off from the boneyard in the upper picture is where the security system will be installed. The two rows of channels in the lower picture is where the new drawbridge will go.

(You may have noticed that that I haven't designated that last bit of soil in the hillside to be dug. Obviously, I'm not going to open our fortress up to the world until we're completely ready to show it what we're made of. After all, it'd be fairly embarrassing if a troop of goblins came only to find that our military was all dying of starvation in the quarantine cells.)

The Master has been suffering from lack of food, as well; supplies have been dropped in, so no harm done, right? *(PS: He's still screaming about his "woody". Just what in the hell is this "woody"!?)*

4 Felsite 202



I've ordered the lever in the dining hall to be deconstructed, as I have no idea what

it does and I need to put another lever where it is right now (it's a feng shui thing).

I'm pleased to see that one of our miners has apparently found a hobby:



Although Obok has been shouting about how he's "going on vacation, going on vacation, hahahahaha", which doesn't make much sense to me seeing as how he's currently incarcerated:



Whatever floats his boat, I guess.

12 Felsite 202

Elves have arrived to trade with us! Unfortunately, we're still not letting anything in (I'm waiting until the bridge gets done), so they're just going to have to see the sights; there are a *lot* of sights to see around here, so I think they should be able to keep themselves occupied.

Meanwhile, Bombzero has selected a suitable location to slice that month-old yak corpse to ribbons:



Apparently, the gibbering of that yak is "strangely soothing, really".

14 Felsite 202

Nuri, our surgeon, has been possessed and has claimed a mason's shop! Hopefully, we'll be getting a shiny new door out of this.

16 Felsite 202



Goblins! One of the waiting migrants is immediately killed – smacked on the head with a mace, I should think. The goblins immediately give chase to the remainder, ignoring the elves for the time being. The chased migrants scatter – one of them is pursued by three goblins at once:



Another squad of goblins turns up right next to the elves and promptly give chase:

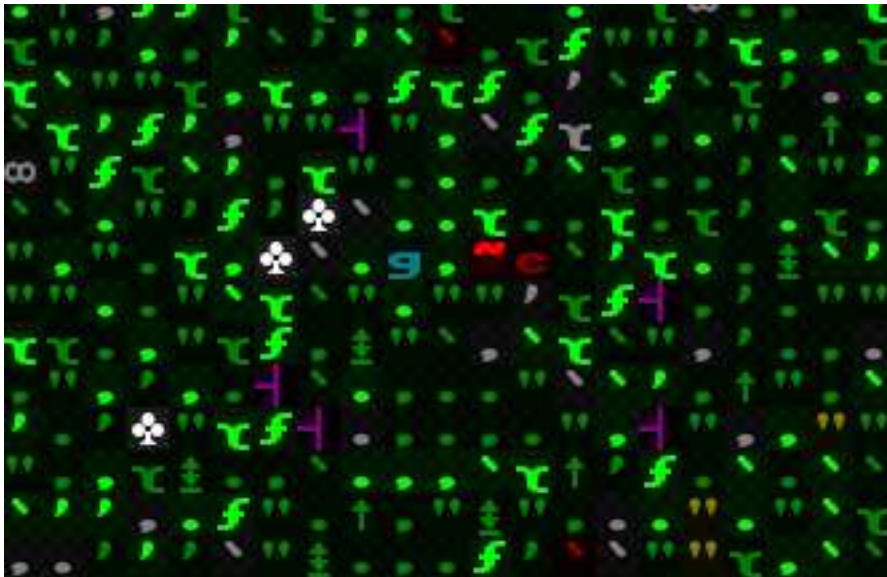


An animal dissector is cornered by a goblin maceman, who proceeds to kill him very, very slowly:



I'm not sure what the goblin is trying to do here. He could easily kill his helpless victim with a simple blow to the head, and the effects of extended blunt-force trauma on the dwarven psyche have already been comprehensively documented. As distasteful as the dissection of live subjects is, I don't think it merits this grade of abuse on its practitioners.

Meanwhile, a goblin swordsman takes it upon himself to ensure that a nearby baby chicken meets its end:



He breaks off from the group and chases the panicked animal over half of our land.

The continued sadism of the goblins is frankly quite disturbing – upon catching up to the chick, he decides that the sword currently in his hand is too good for it, and instead opts to bite the helpless bird's wing off:

The Goblin Swordsman bites The Stray Chick
 apart the skin!
 The Goblin Swordsman latches on firmly!
 The Goblin Swordsman shakes The Stray Chick
 the severed part sails off in an arc!
 →The right wing is ripped away and remains

The poor little chicken dies of blood loss moments later, its innocent blood mingling
 with the foul, coagulated mess coating the landscape:

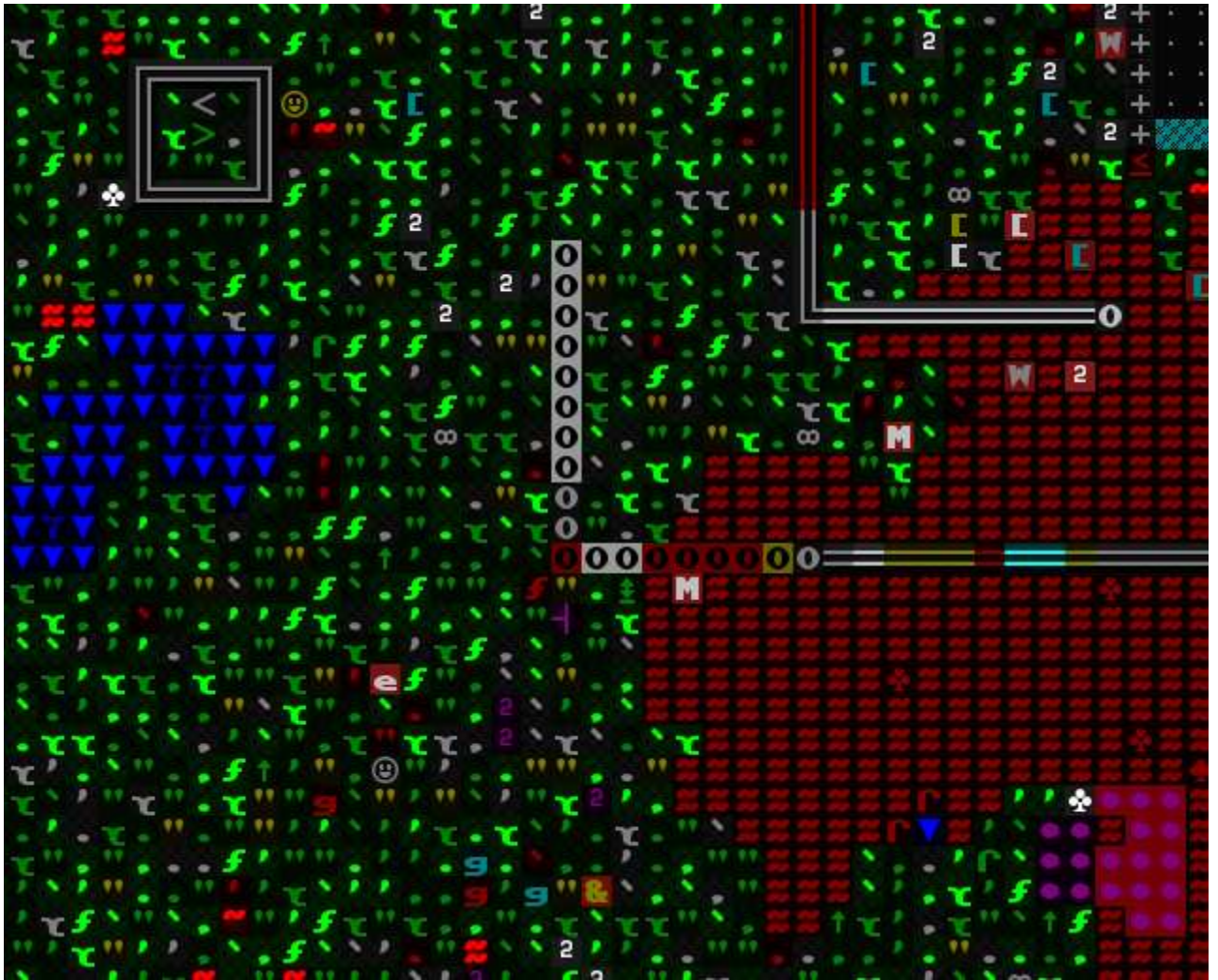


Of the elves that came to Spearbreakers to trade, only one now remains, fleeing in
 terror from a goblin axeman:

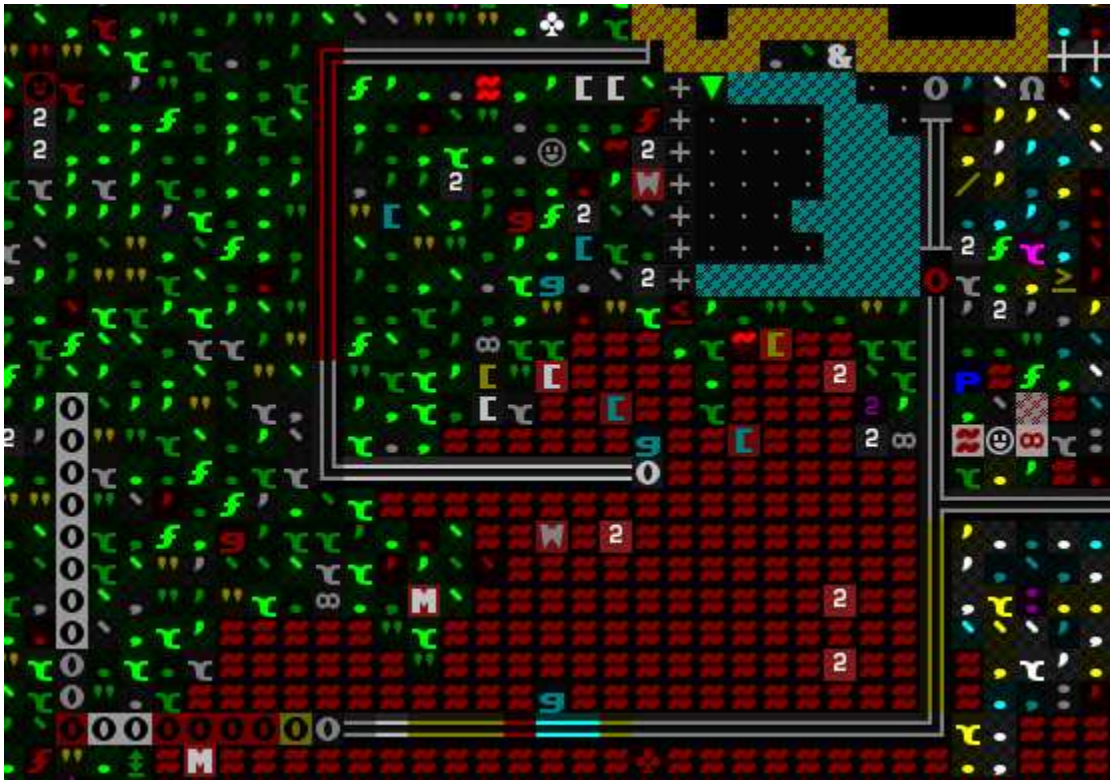


He later escapes off the map. I'm sure nobody will believe his tales of this place, so
 I'm not worried about trade.

Only two of the stranded migrants yet survive. One is converged upon by a squad of
 goblins:



They chase him into Talvieno's swirly walls, ignoring the other for the time being. Unfortunately, the bridge is down, so it looks like there's no escape:



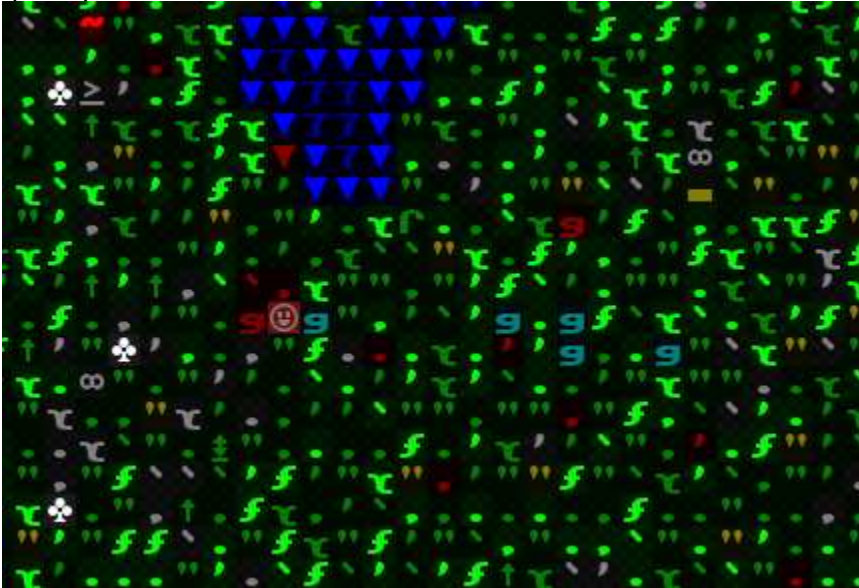
But he manages to outwit his attackers and flee back the way he came:



Bombzero continues to cheerfully strip down her yak corpse for parts, blissfully unaware of the drama playing out not ten feet away.

The clever gambit was for naught, however. The goblins catch up to the dwarf and

quickly end him:



The last remaining migrant waits on the map edge. There is no-one to save him. He is doomed:



Mestthos Monomtôsed, Spinn
"Mestthos Paperstopped"
♂

After a brief intermission in which the goblins club a nearby puppy to death, a maceman – the same one, I believe, who was responsible for the animal dissector's earlier agonizing death – corners the last dwarf and slowly tortures him:



Before finally getting bored and finishing him off with a blow to the head:

→The Goblin Maceman bashes The Spinner in the
flail)), bruising the muscle, jamming the s
tearing the brain!

And so ends the saga of the Outliers of Spearbreakers.

...Fuck! Why the fuck am I always out of wine!? Fuck...

20 Felsite 202

The goblins are still outside. We're going to have to wait until our military is out of quarantine and properly-equipped before we can force them out.

Nuri still hasn't found what she needs for whatever the (suggestively-named, might I add) crazy person living inside her head wants to do:

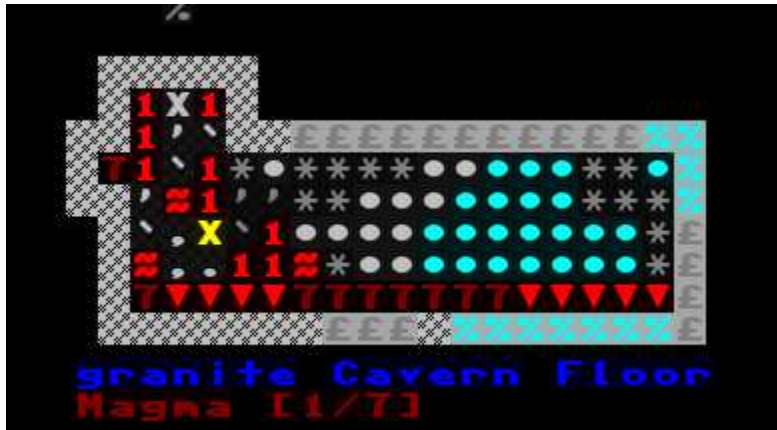


Unfortunately, we don't have any cloth – I tried scavenging the depot, but it seems that the traders hadn't brought any, either – and, again, none of the previous

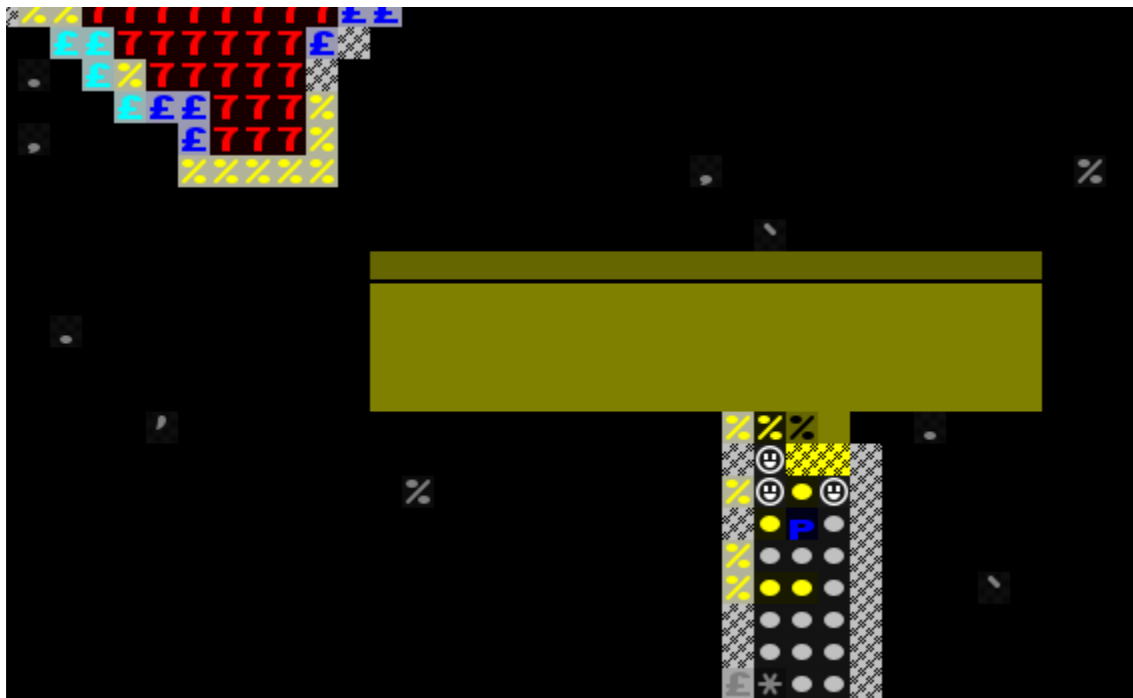
overseers had seen fit to grow anything other than plump helmets, so making our own isn't an option. And pig tails won't be in season for over a week, and even then they'll take time to grow...

...I wonder if it's possible to brew liquor from cave moss? This calls for scientific inquiry...

Also, one of our woodworkers just told me that she had gone down to get something from the forge level (I have no idea what or why, because there isn't actually anything down there yet) and found *this*:



As fascinating as this phenomenon is to me, a forge level that inexplicably fills with puddles of magma is far too hazardous to be of any use to us, so I've ordered the construction of a new forging room elsewhere:



That piece of adamantite showing through the sea's inner wall is tempting, but I'd

very much like to avoid poking at that particular hornet's nest for now.

The solstice is nearly upon us. Soon, it will be time to release the imprisoned military.

I'll feel a lot safer once they're out, I think.

SPLINT:

8th Slate, 202. Interim entry.

I'm becoming wary of this Mr Frog fellow. Honestly even I thought it strange when he ordered the troopers locked into containment cells - I am no fool. I see how those things are used by that damnable corporation - rather than just have them patched up and sent back to training.

He questioned why I had Fischer training the others out by the depot, when the reason to have an immediate response handy to aggressors while the bridge is down should have been obvious.

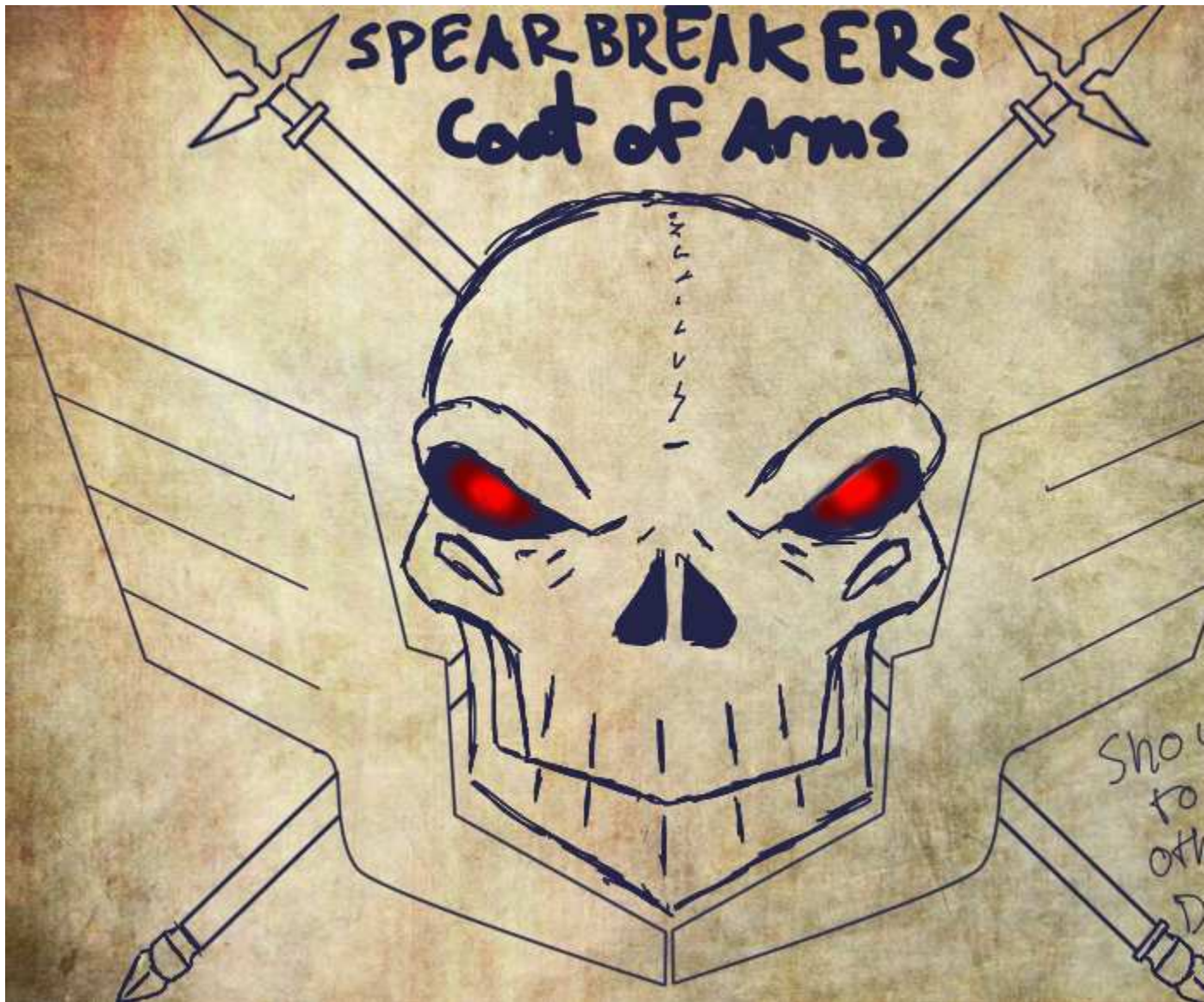
I was also going through the records and found that pitchblende mechanism Mr Frog brought to my attention; Who the fuck thought using our hammerstones for a mechanism would be a good idea!? If I find out who made that I may well beat them myself and save Mr Frog the hassle of selecting a hammerer.

15th Slate, 202. Interim entry.

These losses are starting to become unacceptable. How am I to gather an army to fight these invaders if they insist on dying or turning into said invaders!? If my instructor ends up dead I'll have to insist upon leading the army myself.

I've also been hearing the voices again. Maybe Stova's death is starting to wear me down, or it could be I heard The Master yelling for wood polish again. I swear, if it were legal he'd marry that stupid pole. I'm beginning to regret ever having it commissioned for him.

- On the following page is an image of crossed pikes behind a winged skull.



(Talvieno): Surprised nobody even considered my idea for the continuation issue, but oh well. I didn't spend long on it, though it did make sense, for the most part. (after all, when the narrator goes stark raving mad, anything goes)

(Draigneon): Just to help me get this straight, the continuity snarl is primarily caused by the fact that the surface of this realm should be solid obsidian, right?

(Talvieno): Yes, more or less. UNLESS the narrator was stark raving mad, or had no clue what he was talking about! 😊 OR unless a civilization of the future came and screwed everything up, leaping back and forth through space and time several times, yada yada, leaving giant paradoxes in its wake, leaving people frozen in stasis loops, but everything's ok. 😊 OR...

(Splint): @Draigneane: Yup. This is something I more or less handwaved by more or less butchering that one and only aspect of the canon. The spawn are how they are now due to conflicting AI of thieves and building destroyers. But if you have a good idea please share.

(Mr Frog): @Draigneane: Pretty much.

(Draigneane): Or a forgotten beast made of water crashed into the planet, muddying the obsidian and allowing plants to grow again. Skip to a thousand years later and tectonic activity has rearranged the obsidian so that it is no longer a contiguous sheet, and the great, great, grandchildren of those that dug their way out of their sealed fortresses and castles have reclaimed the surface.

(Splint): and thus a whole heap of brainfuck was born, trying to figure out how the fuck anything lives on the world anymore.

(Talvieno): On a related note, did it make sense to anyone that there were records of people visiting Syrupleaf in the exact same thread that they claimed Syrupleaf was immediately destroyed by the gods after it fell? I mean, even in the original story there were two completely different timelines.

(Splint): This is true. Very true. Including arguments about Sirrocco's gazebo actually being a gazebo among archeologists.

(Talvieno): So... clearly the world split into multiple timelines (though a cataclysmic clash of corrupted creators' crafts) or the narrator went insane (literally lost it, leaving for ludicrously loony land).

[[Talvieno's note: The following is a landmark post that started a huge discussion, and eventually a timewar between two companies, one of which was Parasol. Instead of rejecting the sci-fi elements, Spearbreakers embraced them wholeheartedly - and begged for more.]]

MR FROG:

From a small bedroom in the heart of Spearbreakers, a message is sent. Both the medium of the message and the means of sending it are unlike anything which would be discovered by the dwarven race for at least 10 millennia (the exact timescale varies somewhat between iterations).

The following is a rough transcription of that message...

DELTA LEVEL CLEARANCE REQUIRED FOR ACCESS

>CLEARANCE LEVEL: DELTA

>YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED TO ACCEPT THIS TRANSMISSION

>SUBJECT: Experiment Operation HS-2-W1412

>MESSAGE BODY:

I fail to see the practical purpose of this experiment. We already know the capabilities of HS-2 from live testing -- what useful additional knowledge could possibly be gained from this? I'm sure upper management has their reasons for this, but they've done a very good job of not making it obvious this time.

In particular, pulling strings to get a party of dwarves sent here was a new low. I draw the line at direct manipulation. It contaminates the data.

I've requested that the operation be called off more than enough times to know that it isn't an option, and it probably wouldn't do much good anyway now that HS-2 has been reintroduced to this iteration (remind me again -- which drooling, vapour-for-brains moron in upmanage called *that* one a good idea?).

In any case, I know my orders, and fully intend to see this through to the end. I'm not happy with this, however.

TALVIENO:

18th Felsite, 502 - Talvi's journal

I'm feelin' better now, 'n I was afore. Mr Frog got one of th' nice crafts-dwarves to make me a stuffed cavy! I drew a picshur o' her - here she is:



she's all cute and such, and she has a nice pretty lil' hairbow in her hair, 'cuz she's goin' a courtin'. She's gonna find a nice, strong cavy man an' they're gon' get married, and live happ'ly e'er after. =D

Mr Frog's been givin' me work, same as I used to do - I'm learnin' to build stuff! he says I'll get better if I have things to get my mind off of other things... I dunno what he means, though.

People come 'round to see me every now and then, but mainly I talk to Joseph. He's tall, and nobody else can see him 'cuz he's so fast and good at hiding. He tells me that there were people outside, and they alls got slaughtered. Well. I think they were stupid not to come in. Anyone can climb a vert'cal bridge - he says so. Oh, and 'fore I ferget - Mr Frog never did get around to sayin' if he took care of Nomia for me.

Poor girl... I hope she doesn't mind sleepin' on the grass so much. I'm jus' happy I have my cavy room.

SOLPYRE:

Quote from: Talvieno on February 28, 2012, 02:11:30 pm

Here's my theory on what happened: Holistic and her crew dug down to the mantle, released the lava, yada yada, everything burns, blah blah blah, *BUT!* The dwarf narrating everything is trapped in a little (insert magma-safe stone here) tower near Syrupleaf. The magma raises to the top of the tower (fortunately the windows are made out of obsidian cabochons or something), turns to obsidian, and *to the narrator* it looks like, for all the world, that the world is covered with obsidian. Being locked away in the pitch-black tower for the rest of his miserably short life would more or less make it feel pretty natural to assume that the gods had abandoned the planet for good.

"ARMOK WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME"



sorry about the huge size

(Mr Frog): I don't really like the idea of discrediting the narrator. It feels kind of cheap.

(SolPyre): aww even after the pic...

(Talvieno): Well, yeah... But you have to admit - what the last narrator was saying didn't even match the rest of the story. So either that narrator was incorrect, or the other ones were...

(SolPyre): To clarify I liked the ending the last narrator wrote, there was a poetic finality to it, but for the purposes of this fort the narrator trapped in/on a tower workaround is my favorite.

(Talvieno): I'm the exact same way - I'd rather we not have to have a workaround at all... but we're kind of driven to it.

(Splint): We'll work around it. We're already discussing some omnipotent and deranged multidimensional company and maddorfs trapped in towers watching massive clusterfucks.

(Ashsaber): Considering the whole "world is flooded with magma and is now obsidian" deal...

It's kind of hard to travel around the world and confirm that, indeed, the world is now obsidianized, isn't it?

SOLPYRE:

On the way to Spearbreakers there is a boulder that sits by the path, if it can be called a path. The boulder is oddly smoothed and upon its broadest face is carved this scene.



"I heard banging... what are
Engraver cancels leave goodbye messs

(The Master): I've got it! **WE CARVE A PEDO-FACE ON TO THE VISIBLE SIDE OF THE MOON, CHANGE THE NAME OF THE WORLD TO TERMINA, THEN DROP THE MOON ON TO THE FORTRESS AFTER THREE DAYS AND SIX HOURS AND BLOW UP THE WORLD!**

Semi-seriously though...Parasol has access to time-control technology, so why not say that right before the world ended in flames and magma, an emergency fail-safe device located in Parasol headquarters activated, reverting time to a specific date. Maybe it would also bring the current members of Parasol including the chairman(?) to a secure Outside-Of-Time facility, allowing Parasol to continue it's research undisturbed.

(Splint): That's actually not a bad idea. But this is literally taking place roughly 50 years after the shit hit the fan in Syrupleaf. [[Talvieno's note: Later it was decided that this

wasn't the case. Time was decided to have restarted after Parasol put the world in stasis, putting us 200 years in. It was the preferred way to explain why all of Spearbreakers' Spawn are different from that of Syrupleaf (namely, they can infect dwarves).]]

(The Master): Maybe Parasol also has a device akin to the G.E.C.K. in the Fallout franchise?

MR FROG:

1 Hematite 202

The cave moss experiment was a failure. I still taste sounds and have only recently started to regain feeling in my extremities.

On the plus side, the potent neurotoxic and psychoactive effects give me hope that, once I've isolated the active compound, we'll be able to make millions selling the stuff for military and recreational purposes.

I've decided to lock Nuri in the masonry area until we can get the needed supplies:



On that note, I've designated some new farm plots so that we'll have more pig tails in the future:



Side Note: My little misadventure with the cave moss has given me a healthy dose of perspective. Wine is quite nice, actually. In fact, I could really go for a keg or two of the stuff right about now.

The order for the quarantined dwarves to be released has finally been given. The floodgates are being opened and the walls blocking off the hospital have been marked for tearing down:





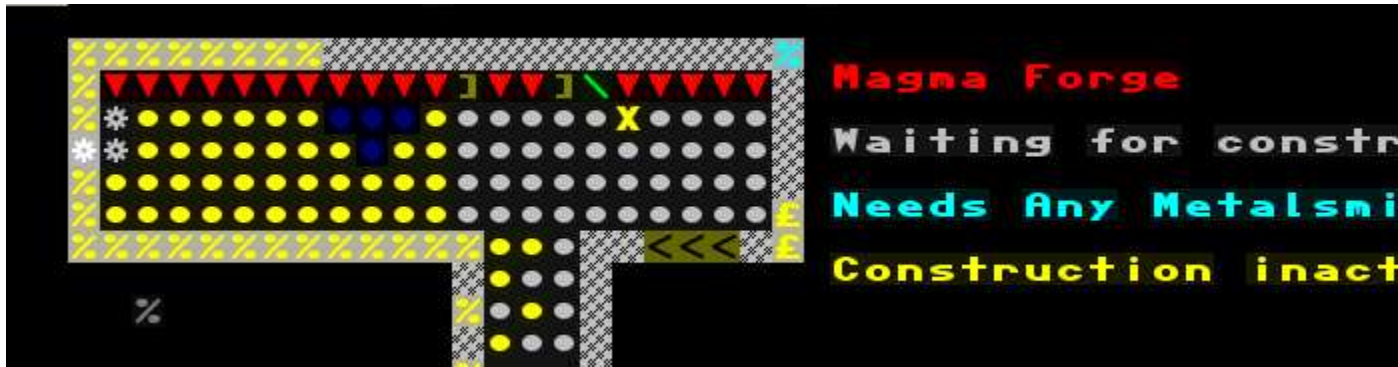
I imagine that this must be a joyous occasion for all, especially The Master, who is apparently in desperate need of some alcohol to calm his spirits:



I must say, he burned through his wine rations *awfully* quickly. I wholeheartedly approve.

4 Hematite 202

The new forge room has been completely dug out, so I've ordered the construction of the new forges:



As well, I've ordered the digging of a second room above the forges to store supplies in:



Of course, we'll have to wait a bit before any of this is actually built, as our entire labour force is currently dedicating its efforts towards scavenging the late trade caravan's goods from the depot as quickly as possible:



I must say, their sheer focus and determination in completing this task is truly admirable.

7 Hematite 202

I have begun my reorganization of our military arrangements. All current squads have been disbanded so that we may have a clean slate to start from. In addition, I have marked three new sets of uniform specifications, all identical except for the weapon. This should greatly simplify equipment regulation:

UNIFORMS	ITEMS	SELECTION
Leather armor	mail shirts	low boots
Metal armor	breastplates	socks
Archer	helms	shoes
Pike	greaves	high boots (f
Axes	gauntlets	sandals (fore
Hammers	low boots	chausses (fore
	shields	
	war hammers	

I am deeply concerned by the fact that this civilization apparently lacks the quite-basic technological know-how required to produce something as simple as a high boot. Between this and the pitchblende lever, I am frankly depressed by the apparently-quite-primitive state of these dwarves' science.

In happier news, the (patent-pending) Fiend-Revealing Observation Garrison has been completed:



This room pictured here is situated directly over our nascent entrance, which can be more-or-less clearly seen through the floor grates. Upon detecting an unannounced guest, the Avian Detection and Alert System affixed to the center will -- through means which I am not permitted to disclose -- remotely alert every dwarf in the fortress to their presence.

I also tried to teach it to sing little welcome songs, but both it and the other dwarves objected quite violently, so I sadly was forced to abort that operation.

10 Hematite 202

I've marked off a dumping area in the new magma forges:

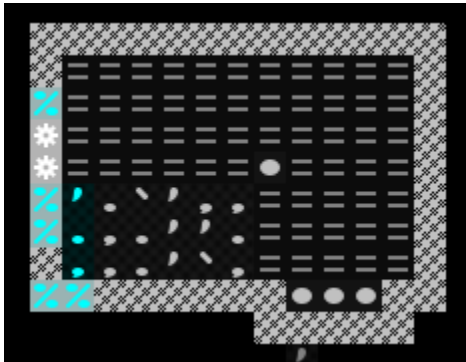


This should help us keep things a little tidier around here.

I've divided the military into several squads of three for easier training. Each squad uses a different weapon. The equipment is all there in the uniform specs for each squad, so we won't have to worry about that as much.

The division of labour in this fortress continues to baffle me, but from what I can tell we don't have enough furnace operators or smiths to meet our needs. I've assigned some nonessential workers to perform these tasks; they aren't skilled, and they're rather irritated at being asked to divert their live's paths away from their dream careers as fish cleaners/tanners/etc., but I'm sure they'll pick up skill as they go.

19 Hematite 202



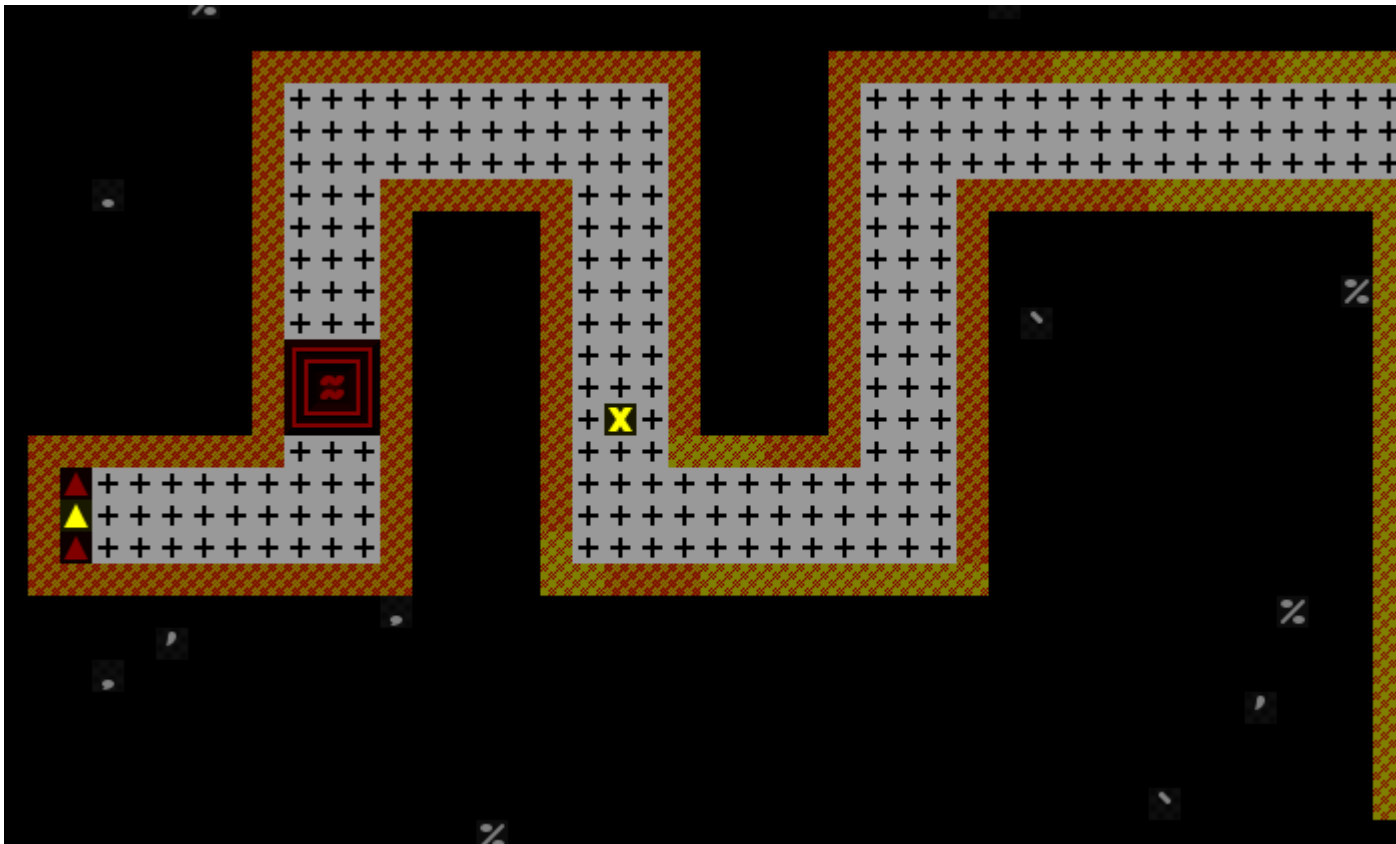
The clearing of rubble from the forge stockpile is now mostly complete. I have designated stockpiles for hematite, magnetite, and various bars. Having the materials all nearby should greatly increase the rate of production.

I've ordered the new smelters to begin smelting iron ores:



We'll be ready to start forging armour once they've produced enough bars. Happily, it seems that the deceased traders had brought several anvils with them, so I've ordered the construction of another forge.

22 Hematite 202



I've ordered our new entrance hall to be floored over entirely. Should look a bit nicer once it's complete.

Bombzero's sheer focus on butchering her yak corpses is truly exemplary:



I'm sure her determination will be a go a long way towards inspiring the rest of our workforce to a similarly-high level of dedication.

1 Malachite 202

I was confused by the fact that the dwarves all seemed to be dumping bars onto the floor of the new bar stockpile instead of placing them in bins as I had expected.

I at first worried that the previous overseers had been too busy to produce bins, but I soon found the true reason:



Mugs. Hundreds and hundreds of mugs. Big mugs. Little mugs. Mugs with things like “#1 Dad” engraved on the side. Mugs that smell as though they have been recently used to prepare certain illicit substances. I cannot imagine *any* earthly reason to have so many mugs, but that hardly changes the fact that there are in fact *hundreds* of mugs in here, overflowing out of bins and littering the floors and piled to the ceiling around every crafts shop like little mug mountains. I am actually deeply, *deeply* disturbed by the sheer number of mugs in this fortress. My most basic assumptions about the nature of the dwarven psyche have been completely shattered by all of these innumerable mugs.

...Wine. I need more wine. That should fix it.

In any case, I was going to have more bins produced, but then I realized that all of our wood supplies were locked inside the masonry room with Nuri.

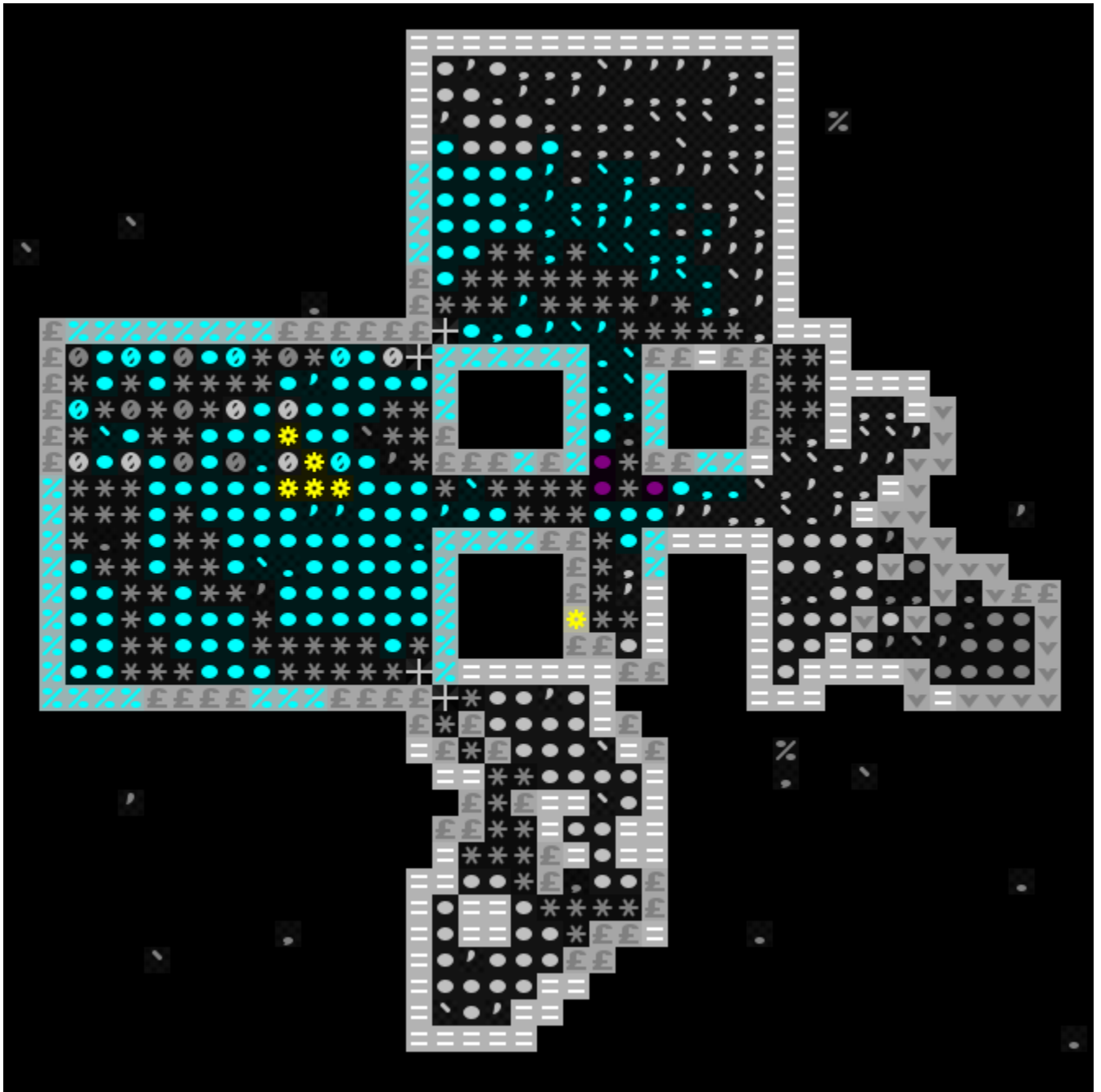
Fortunately, I located a bar stockpile which presumably had been in use for the old forging operations, and there were some spare bins there. I’ve cancelled the stockpile designation, so we now have some bins.

I noticed that we don’t have enough axes to equip our new axedwarf force, so I’ve ordered some to be produced:

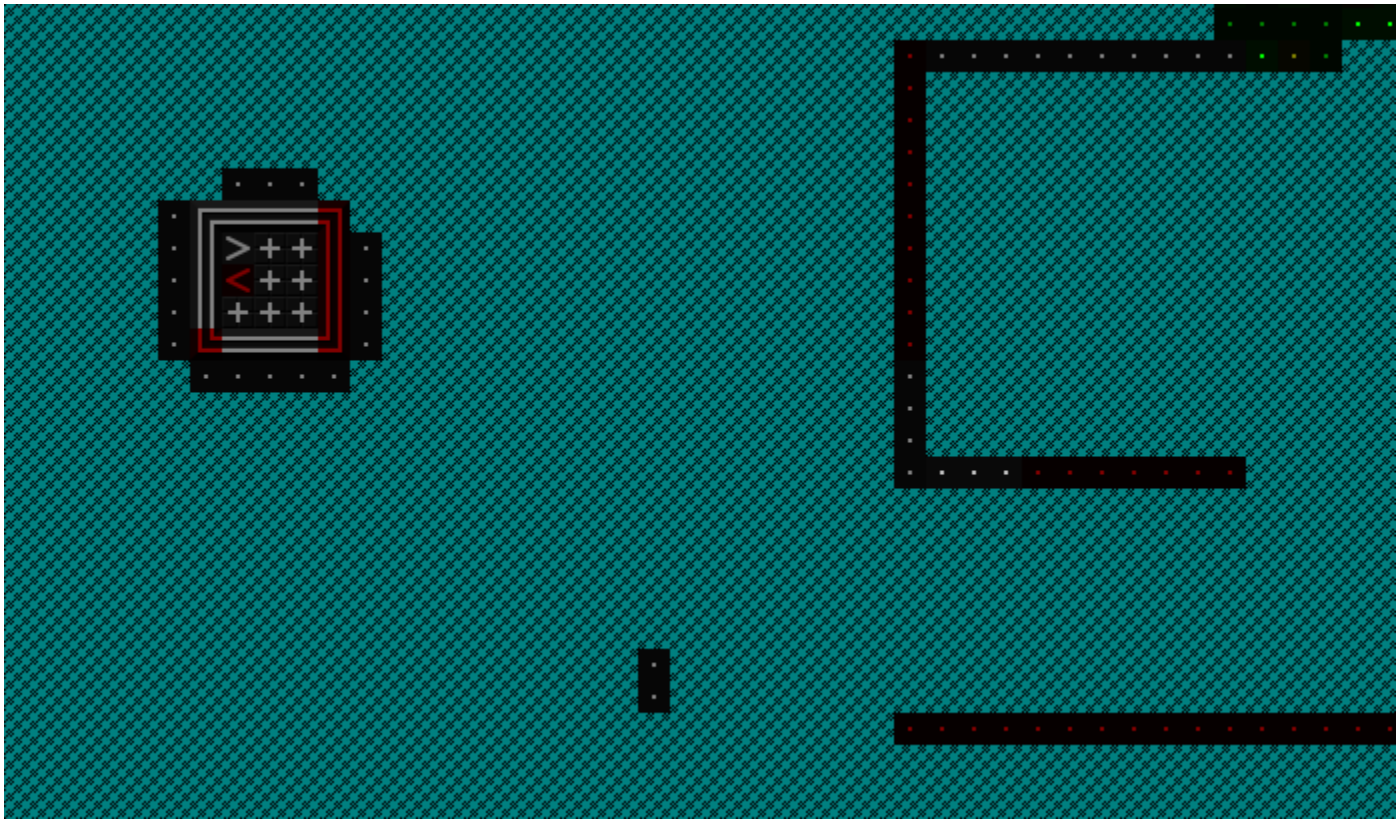


4 Malachite 202

I’ve noticed two more architectural oddities while surveying the fortress:



Some sort of odd half-finished cloverleaf structure located down near the level of the first cavern layer. The left "leaf" appears to be in use for burial purposes, but if the other three had any intended purpose then there's no indication of it.



A similarly-unfinished tower located a bit away from the old entrance. Judging from the fortifications on top, I assume that it was originally intended for use as a protected location for archers to shoot from, though both the placement and sharp firing angle are less-than-ideal. Happily, I may have figured out a way to repurpose this.

The voices in Nuri's head seem to have finally gotten the better of her:

```
>Nuri< Enosplek, Surgeon
"Nuri" Glossshock"
Running around babbling!, ♀

No Job
Novice Mason
Dabbling Grower
Great Wound Dresser
Great Surgeon
Novice Appraiser (Rusty)
Professional Persuader
Dabbling Negotiator
Great Judge of Intent
Dabbling Comedian
Dabbling Consoler
```


She seems fairly harmless, so I've ordered the reopening of the masonry room. Now we can produce some more bins.

17 Malachite 202

Our stock of iron bars has increased to 45. Soon, we will have enough to fuel round-the-clock armour forging for a time. I have ordered the construction of a third smelter to further increase the rate of iron production.

20 Malachite 202



Ashsaber still remains confined to his cell, his monstrous screeching echoing through the halls.

Happily, I think I've figured out a way to make him useful.

23 Malachite 202

Our crop of pig tails is starting to come in. I just need to get a work area set up and we should have textile productions going.

28 Malachite 202

The fortress attracted no migrants this sea

Disappointing. Fortunately, the small fortune in armour we're about to produce should soon send visitors swarming to this place.

In other news, construction on the additions to the Mysterious Tower of Mystery has begun:



I've cancelled the flooring of the entrance hall, as it was taking far too long and tying up our entire masonry force. We can get back to that later.

3 Galena 202

I've decided that, even if we won't be putting a proper floor in quite yet, we might as well make our entrance look presentable, so I've ordered the floor to be furrowed:

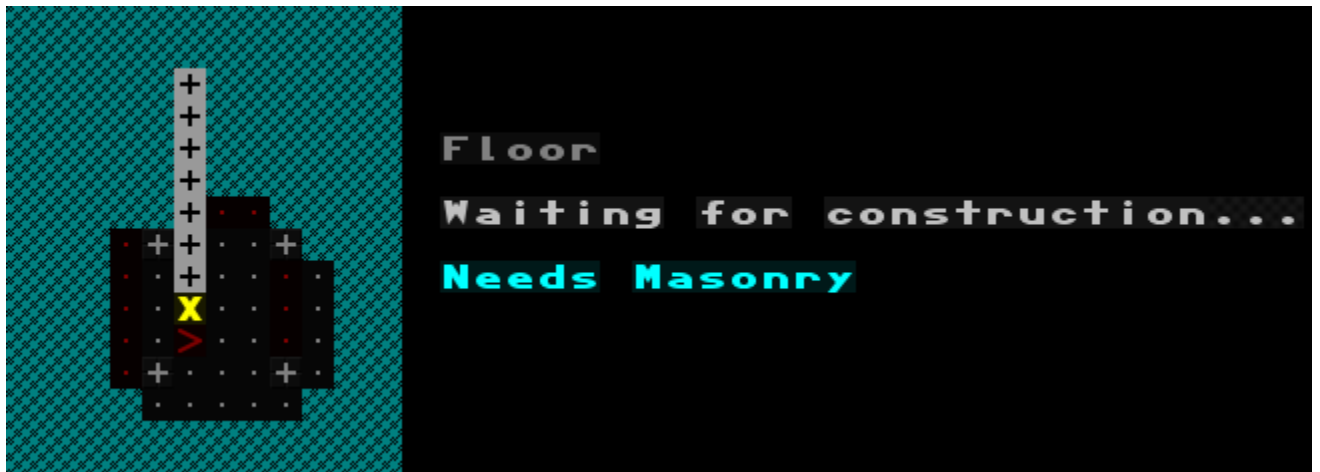


5 Galena 202



I've ordered another hole to be channelled above Ashsaber's cell, this one high enough so that he won't be able to reach anyone standing next to the channel. I think that this'll allow him to be useful in some respect.

Meanwhile, construction on the tower addition continues:



9 Galena 202

The additional drop shaft into Ashsaber's cell has been completed. This one is of a slightly different nature than the others:



Now all I need is a suitable test subject...

11 Galena 202



On my orders, The Master has grabbed a stray cavy boar and is escorting it to the shaft. It does not appear to belong to anyone, and covies are too small to be an effective meat source in any case, so I doubt that it will be missed. He throws the subject into the shaft...



I am delighted to report that the test execution was a complete success on all counts. The subject landed in Ashsaber's cell more-or-less unharmed, after which the subject was immediately torn to shreds by the crazed ex-dwarf while I watched in interest through the surveillance devices I had set up:

→The sergeant claws The Stray Cavy Boar in t
claw, left hand, tearing apart the muscle a
lung!
The Stray Cavy Boar is having trouble breat

Before the subject expired due to severe hemorrhaging, Ashsaber somehow managed to bite off a single toe, a feat of precision made all the more astounding by the size and accompanying unwieldiness of the Spawn's mouthparts:

→The sergeant bites The Stray Cavy Boar in t
shattering the nail!
The sergeant latches on firmly!
The sergeant shakes The Stray Cavy Boar and
toe and the severed part sails off in an ar
The second right front toe is ripped away a
grip!

Until now, I was not aware that the Spawn possessed such dexterity. I believe this merits further testing, perhaps with a larger subject to prolong the observation period.

(Hypothesis: The great degree of manual precision demonstrated in this experiment is related to the fact that the Spawn in question was once biologically a dwarf -- a species widely renowned for having well-tuned fine-motor skills even when heavily drunk.)

The subject's carcass is still in the cell, lying on top of Ashsaber's discarded clothing:



Perhaps next I'll test how the Spawn react to a large quantity of mugs being dropped on them from above.

13 Galena 202

A human caravan arrived today to find a sealed-off fortress in the middle of a corpse-strewn woodland, the better part of which was covered with a thick, stinking coating of coagulated blood. We still aren't ready to open back up, though, so they'd better get comfortable. They weren't immediately killed on arrival, which means that the goblins are now gone, so that's good.

Also good is the fact that our iron supplies are now large enough for us to begin forging armour full-time:



We have enough weapons now, so I've set our military to train at the barracks:



Many of the troops are still fairly green, despite their readily-visible emotional trauma, but we should have an effective fighting force built up reasonably quickly.

17 Galena 202

Today, I learned something that horrified me. Every piece of wood in the fortress has now been converted into bins -- that isn't what's distressing me at the moment, however:



The mugs. The *mugs*. We still haven't managed to pack away all the fucking mugs. Even after completely exhausting our wood supplies, we *still* have piles and piles of mugs lying everywhere, flooding bins and stockpiles and burying helpless crafts shops through sheer force of numbers.

I need a drink.

19 Galena 202

It seems that the dwarves have taken notice of the cavy's absence:

The Stray Cavy Boar (Tame) has been missing

There are now roughly 3,000 posters plastered over various parts of the fortress, each inscribed with something along the lines of "Have You Seen This Animal?" along with what appears to be a crude drawing of a cavy. Apparently, Talvieno has been solely responsible both for producing and distributing said posters. Her work ethic should be taken as an example by the other labourers.

22 Galena 202

It appears that one of the deceased would-be migrants still isn't quite finished with the mortal coil:

**→Likot Mörularzes, Ghostly Animal Trainer ha
fortress!**

Fortunately, I've compared the apparition's behaviour with current documentation on spectral phenomena and confirmed that it does not pose a significant threat to the fortress's operation.

The equinox is nearly upon us. Soon, it will be autumn.

SPLINT:

25th Malachite, 203. Interim entry.

Dear god. I had neglected the inventory coming out of the crafts shop, and Mr Frog has recently brought it to my attention that there are ungoddly amounts of mugs. *MUGS. MUGS EVERYWHERE.* How the hell did I even miss this!? My office is practically on top of the damn shops, and I even worked in there for a time! How did I miss this!? I went down after Mr Frog told me and while I love having a tankard to toss at annoying visitors, this is just ridiculous.

If we could make a weapon that fires mugs we'd at least have a purpose for the damned mountains of them. I wish I could remember where that tetrhedrite vein was that Sus found the first year.... At least with some copper and silver bins we could get the damn things sorted.

I'll have to inquire about any flux the caravan should have brought. I had intended to make steel pikes for Fischer's original group, a a sort of prestige weapon, maybe have them decorated with bone and such, to make them feel appreciated. And if anyone is using my pitchblende for anything *OTHER* than bashing sticks I'll use one of Stova's to beat the offending party into a catatonic state. The pitchblende lever to the old gate was bad enough.

And all the mugs have me wondering if we should have named this place Spearbreakers, The mountain of mugs.

[[Talvieno's note: Hidden in the following post is Mr Frog's idea that it was in fact his dwarf that re-released the Holistic Spawn. This went unnoticed at the time, and later started a huge argument when it came to light.]]

MR FROG:

DELTA CLEARANCE REQUIRED FOR ACCESS

>CLEARANCE LEVEL: DELTA

>YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED TO ACCEPT THIS TRANSMISSION

>SUBJECT: Experiment Operation HS-2-W1412

>MESSAGE BODY:

Talvieno's willing handing-over of the control of the fortress's operations to me was both unexpected and completely unprompted. Risking contamination of experiment data (and, really, **what** data? What useful purpose does this operation serve?) due to direct involvement is preferable to the potential suspicion that may have taken root had I refused her offer without any adequately-explained reason given.

I am fully aware of the fact that I personally oversaw the re-introduction of HS-2 to this iteration, thank you very much. In fact, I thought that it was a stupid idea then, too. We shouldn't go around stabbing dodos just because some mind-sick vapour-for-brains hooplehead in upmanage thought it'd be funny to see how quickly or

slowly they'd die.

I'd really like to know just what in the hell *you* would have done in such a situation. They already had ordered the re-introduction of one of the most lethal entities yet to be documented into a world which had nearly destroyed itself just to get rid of them seemingly just for shits and giggles; I can't imagine what they would have done if some idiot had got it in their heads to try saying 'no'.

I can't deal with any of this at the moment. I need a fucking drink.

Incidentally, I need you to send me data on the local subterranean mosses in this region. I have a proposal for a new product.

TALVIENO:

Journal of Talvi Diamondknight, 19th Galena 202

Tessa's been missin for well-on nigh a week now, an I don't have no idea wher she could be! I've been lookin everwher for 'er, but she just ain't nowhere to be seen... I'm awful worried about her, and I'm gonna do somethin. I've had enough of my sweet lil cavies disappearin, I won't stand for none of this no more! Joseph sez I oughter make a picshur, so everbody would know who to look for, so I did - I had a nice dwarf make a drawing here of one of my engravings - he's a right nice dwarf, he is, and a darn good artist, too. Wish I could remember his name... but anyhow:



I imagine that's bout how she looks right now... poor lil Tessa. I'm hopeful someones'll find her and bring her safe back home... I'm postin tons o' these all over, so everybody knows she's missin. I figger about 3,000 of the engravings will be good enough to let 50 or so dwarves know she's missing... Hopefully they'll all see.

I miss my Tessa...

[[Talvieno's note: Following images were taken from Google Images. No copyright infringement intended, or any of that legal crap. Pictures are located at Imageshack.us]]

HARD:

HARD's Journal:



Unknown Date

Last few months were hard i still have nightmares which do not allow me to sleep, i'll be calm only if i kill all of these monsters... ALLL OFFF THEEEEM!

when i was isolated, GODDAMNIT MR FROG THAT WAS HORRIBLE!!... but necessary, i was visited by the holiest Armok himself!! THAT WAS A MIRACLE! beautiful, white rat talking to me, he said: YOU ARE THE CHOSEN ONE WHO MUST RID THE WORLD OF EVIL! and then he disappeared, he also told me to change my name to "Wynz" so I'll be blessed in the battle against Spawns. I MUST DO IT I MUST KILL ALL THE EVIL ARRRRRRRRGHHH...

ok it's time to inform administration about changing the name in my papers.

PRAY THE ARMOK!

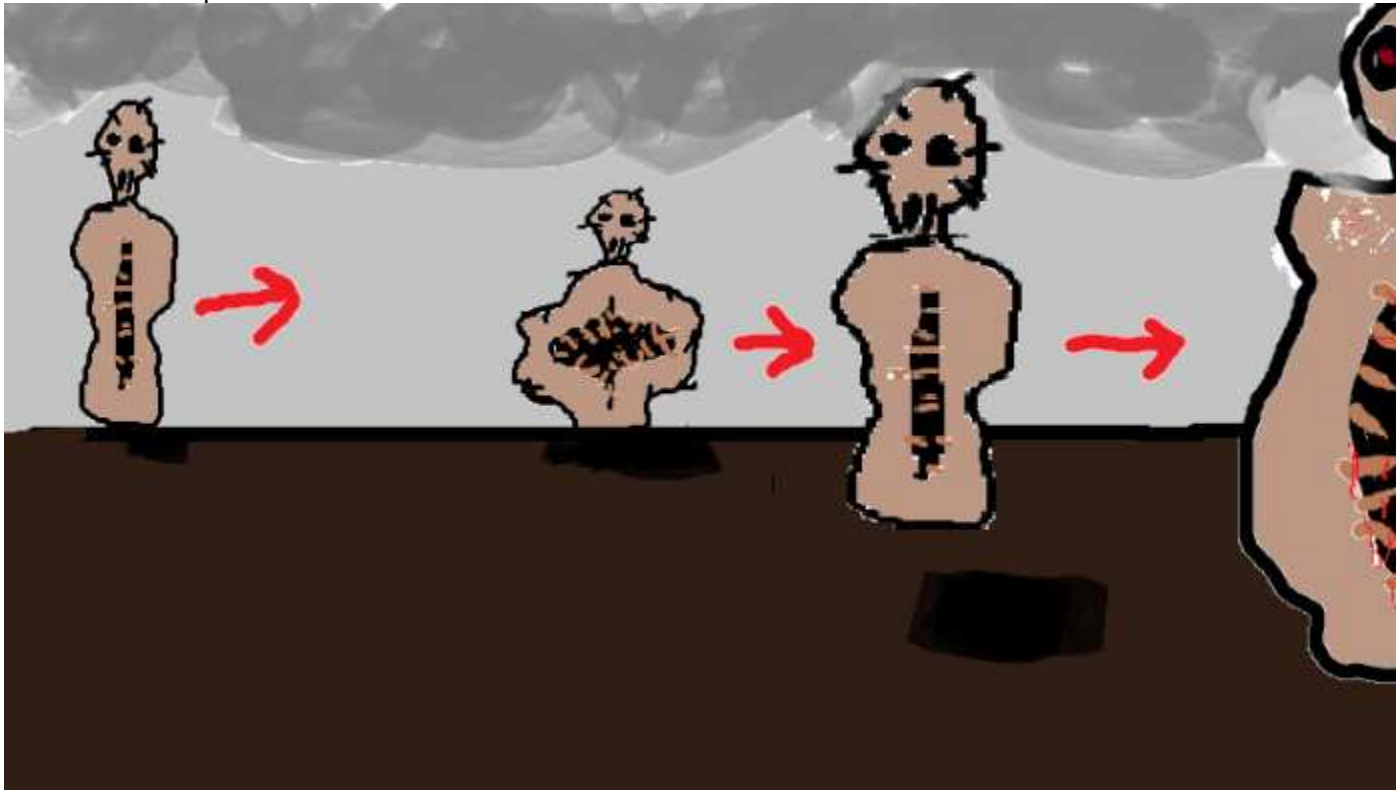
ps. i drew the spawns from my nightmares, i'm gonna watch it all the time i have to get used to their look so i won't be scared in the battle, NO FEAR! NO MERCY!



[[Talviero's note: The question was posed: How do Holistic Spawn attack with their arms and legs chopped off? It was noted they're just as fast without them.]]

TALVIENO:

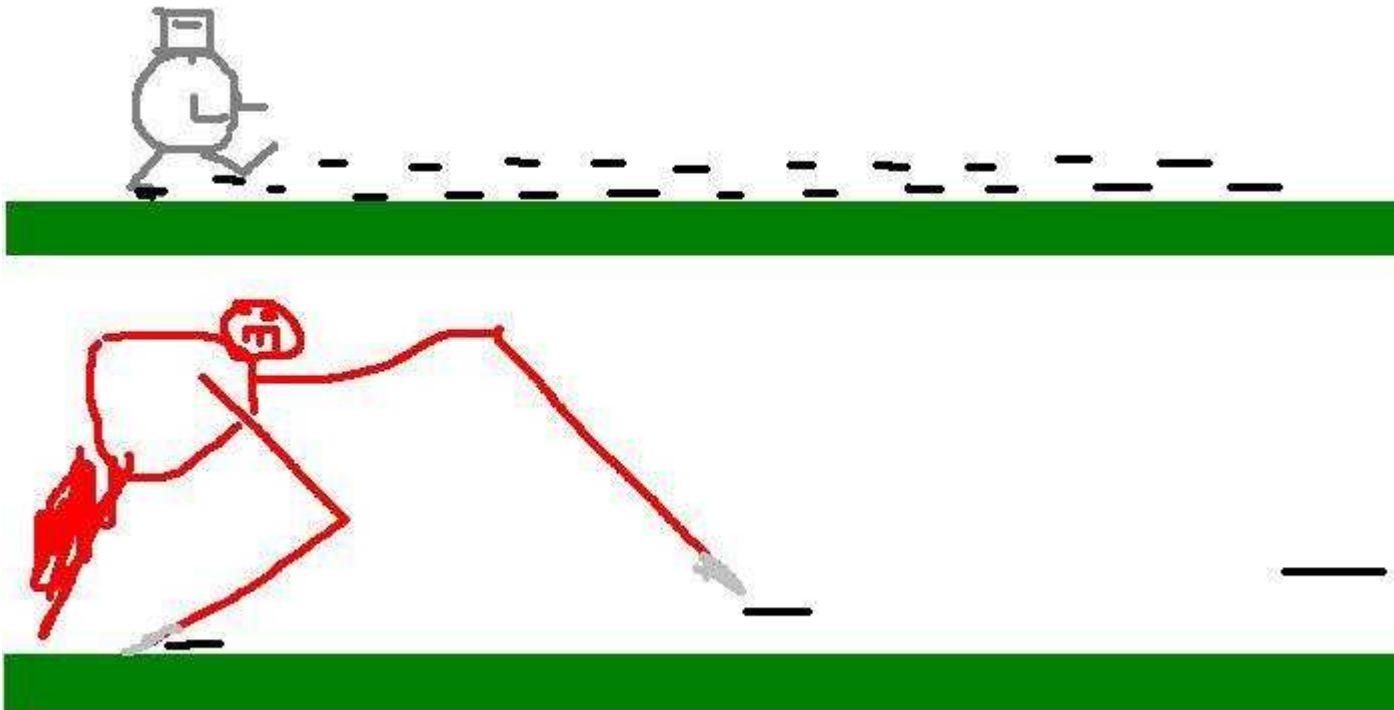
Allow me to explain.



1. The Holistic Spawn, as you see here in Figure A, has its chest cavity closed, and is missing all four limbs. This, while humorously reminiscent of a certain scene in Monty Python and the Holy Grail involving a dark knight, is neither humorous, nor reminiscent. (unless you've previously been attacked, in which case you will not see Phase 2, as you will be running in fear)
2. Phase 2 involves the Holistic Spawn contorting, opening its chestmouth and coiling its body into a nearly unrecognizable state, taking advantage of the fact that it has no working blood vessels or nerves in its body that need to remain intact.
3. Phase 3 involves the Holistic Spawn launching itself through the air, like a snake striking towards its victim. It is thought to be territorial in nature, and is also believed that the Holistic Spawn believes that the entirety of the earth is its territory.
4. Phase 4 apparently involves the Holistic Spawn either massively increased in size, or hovering above the ground without a shadow. It is also speculated that the Holistic Spawn in the image might be in motion, although many have debated whether this be true.
5. Phase 5 involves the Holistic Spawn on top of you, having knocked you over, chomping and gashing at you with its chestmouth and rapidly devouring any limbs you try to push it away with. Although it cannot fit the whole of your body within its mouth, it will continue gnashing at you until you die inevitably of severe blood loss. NOTE: It is recommended that you attempt to stab the Holistic Spawn with your spear before Phase 5 is reached.

HARD:

It's simple, it's not the swing speed that makes them fast, it's their range! if the creature has few meters long hands he can move on them few meters forward with one move, so basically distance that dwarves have to run in xx moves creatures can go with one move.



MR FROG:

1 Limestone 202

I finally got around to having that embarrassing error on the census data corrected:



Also, I've ordered the mining of a gold vein so that we can make sparkly things so

that we can attract migrants:



Finally, out of curiosity, I checked our stock records and:

boxes and bags	58	28	shale
bins	93	18	gneis
barrels	104	18	gypsu
buckets	30	5	jet m
mechanisms	43	52	pitch
trap components	2	8	kaoli
flasks	5	2	micro
goblets	623		mica
toys	5	8	
tools	7		
musical instruments	6	4	
figurines	4	1	

Booze time!

3 Limestone 202

'Sus' Bibandeler, Miner	Dig
'Rodge' Zuntîrdüstik, Miner	On Br
'Bombzero' Tistaangir, Miner	Harve
'Rochia' Fikodsâkzul, Miner	Store
'Chonna' Erushôd, Smithdorf	Forge

Rodge clearly understands the benefits of regular recreation time.

Our smiths are busy with making armour, so I'm going to have the nuggets cut into cabochons to decorate things with. We're a bit short on labourers, so I've ordered some fishery worker to assist with cutting gems.

6 Limestone 202

This is a very sad day for all of us. Nuri apparently dropped dead from dehydration while she was trying to navigate a doorway:



Fortunately -- as was previously touched upon -- one of the previous overseers had thoughtfully installed a respectable number of spare burial receptacles in the cloverleaf, so we'll be able to get the corpse put away before it starts to smell.

9 Limestone 202

We seem to have finished mining that particular gold vein, so I've ordered the miners to dig out a dedicated work space for the jewellers:



I expect we'll be able to get the still-unfinished textiles room to the left completed once some skilled labour comes in.

13 Limestone 202

I've designated a shale stockpile near the entrance hall so that our masons can spend less time hauling materials. I hope to see the entrance properly floored in a timely fashion.

17 Limestone 202

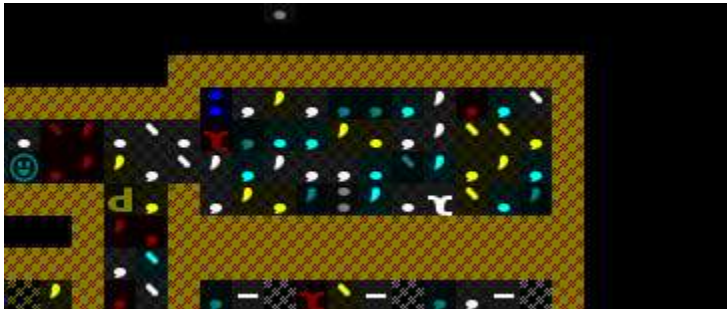
The human caravan has left. Fascinating... while I do commend their tenacity, I should think that it'd take far less than a month of waiting in the bloody rain looking at piles and piles of corpses to realise that we aren't likely to be carving an entryway anytime soon.

Incidentally, I received a very cheerful letter from Talvieno today. She largely rambled through it without really settling on a specific topic, but it mainly concerned cavies and an individual by the name of Joseph (why do I recognize that name...?). Enclosed were what going from the text are seven of Talvieno's toenail clippings and a piece of her lip-skin. I don't recall anybody by the name of Joseph living in this site; I'll have to double-check the census records.

19 Limestone 202

We seem to have enough chainmail now, so I've ordered the forges to slow production somewhat. We still need much more of everything else before our military will be fully-equipped.

Also, I've just now noticed a completely-empty room on the upper floor:



I have absolutely no idea as to what whoever ordered this built was intending to do with it; I can really only guess.

I was confused to find that we apparently do not have anybody by the name of Joseph living in this fortress. Perhaps I misread Talvieno's letter?

24 Limestone 202

The stranded Spawn still remains up on its ledge:



I've tried to soundproof my bedroom, but the blasted thing's shrieking seems to be able to penetrate undampened through any substance. The nightmares are becoming unbearable.

I'd really like some absinthe right about now, but I don't think the stuff's been invented here. Blasted dwarves and their blasted obsession with mushrooms.

28 Limestone 202

I was somewhat confused about the moniker of "Forgotten Beast" given to many of the subterranean caverns' odder and more vicious inhabitants, considering that the vast majority of them have had both their physical and behavioural traits comprehensively documented, but I believe that I finally understand it now:



I confess that the presence of our dear Stumeb here had completely slipped my mind. I would have small holes carved in the cavern wall, that our dwarves may view this unique creature in its natural habitat, but apparently this one shoots webbing, and that stuff's a *bitch* to clean up.

4 Sandstone 202

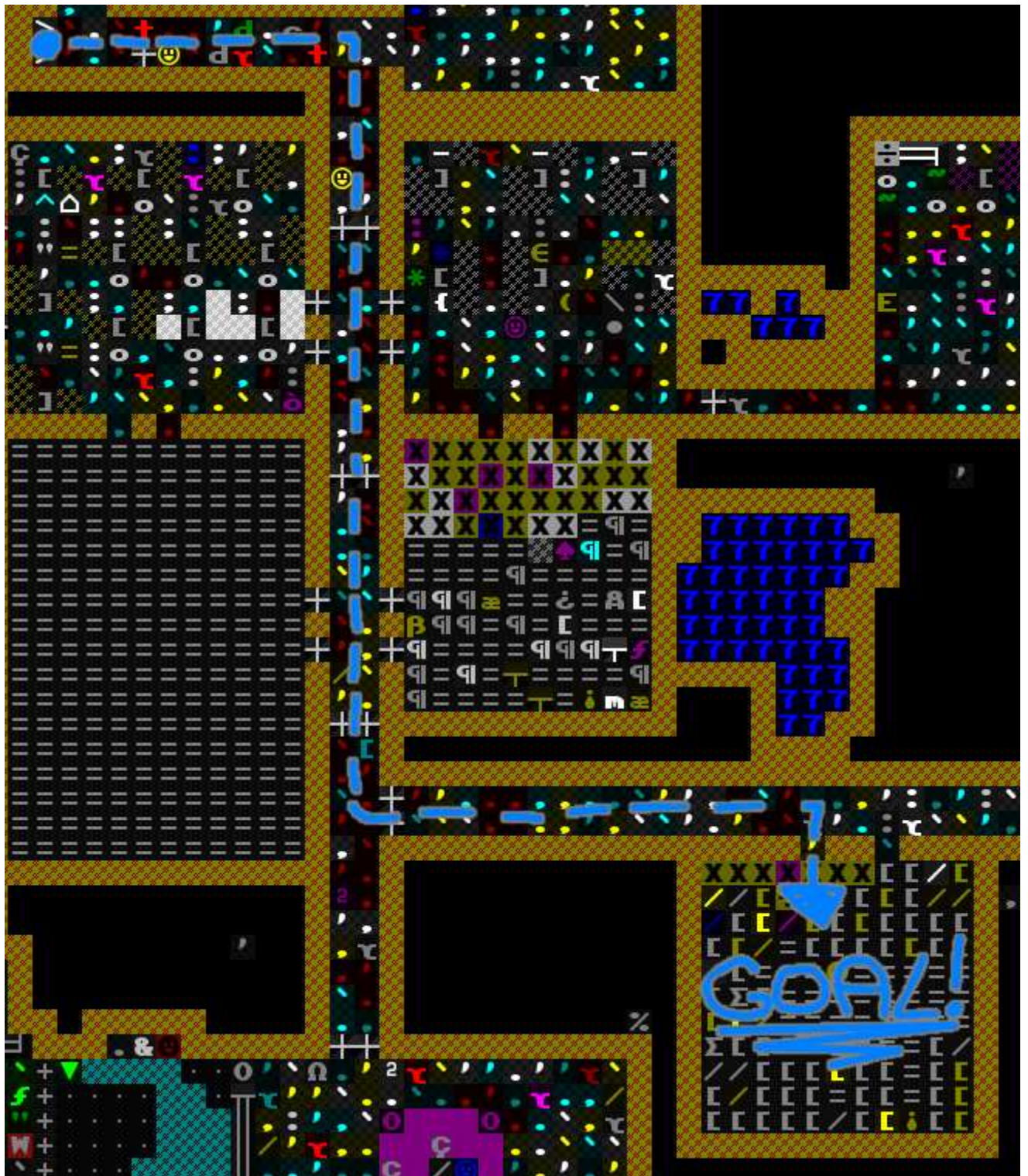


Our jewelers' area is now complete, so I've ordered the cutting of native gold nuggets into cabochons. We'll start getting migrants again once our stock of sparkly crap reaches a sufficient number.

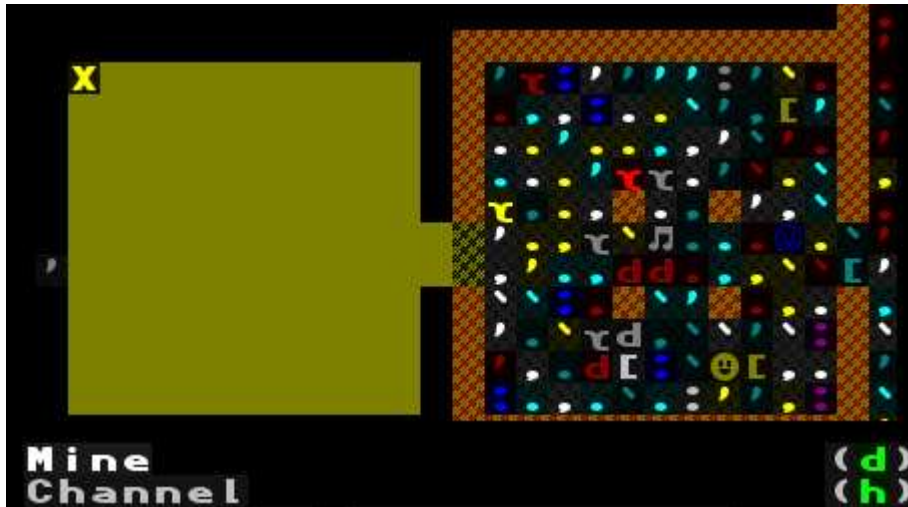
8 Sandstone 202

The sheer distance that our soldiers have been running back and forth across to get equipment and store equipment and whatnot have been greatly irritating to me lately:





So I've ordered that a new room be dug out next to the barracks so that we can store equipment in that instead:



11 Sandstone 202

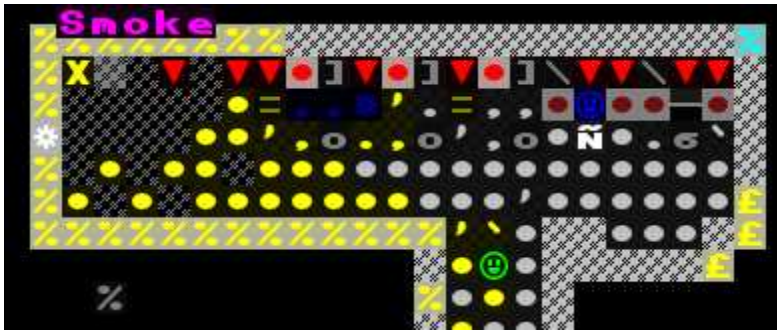
I've noticed lately that various important workers have been wasting precious dwarf-hours hauling stones and chamberpots and shit back and forth between stockpiles and dumping grounds and whatnot when they really should be doing useful things instead. We're short-staffed enough as it is and our workers constantly interrupting their tasks to drag crap everywhere is completely unacceptable. I've told these workers in no uncertain terms that if they don't get their priorities in gear then both the things I will do to them and the implements I will use to do those things with will be far beyond anything their cretinous stone-age backwater imaginations could possibly hope to entertain. The lazy bastards were far from happy about this – quite a few of the blasted rustics even went to far as to express their ire through actual physical violence against my person -- but I frankly think I was completely justified in my anger. In any case, they should stop now.

I now haven't slept for two days because of that damned screeching. I believe the nightmares have had a Pavlovian conditioning effect so strong that it has actually managed to override my natural sleep cycle. I'll look through the data on local subterranean fungi I've received; with any luck I'll be able to cook something up, though the appalling state of scientific affairs in this iteration means that my tools will be limited to whatever I can fashion out of slate rocks and discarded Spawn bones.

In the meantime, I'm going to have a little chat with the brewers and see if we can't come up with something a little stronger than this plump helmet crap. I'm sure nobody will mind if I prematurely introduce a few alcohol-related technological secrets. I don't think booze ever fucked up history. Not by itself, at least.

14 Sandstone 202

Slightly alarming situation in the forge today:



It appears that, while clearing out stone for a gem stockpile below the jewelers' room, I had mistakenly assigned some lignite to be dumped. It is now sitting at the bottom of the forge's magma duct, burning and releasing a massive cloud of smoke. While I am extremely intrigued by the fact that it appears to be burning without any discernible oxygen source, it's probably safer to just stay away from burning things. To that end, I've deactivated the garbage dump area and put in an order for the section to be walled off.

I've noticed a large amount of unused furniture lying around in a stockpile:



Hopefully we'll be able to find a home for it all.

I had initially attempted to concoct a tranquilizer to aid sleep, but I abandoned it after the first use of it resulted in an extremely-unpleasant incident of sleep paralysis in which the socks on my floor appeared to turn into screaming dwarves being attacked by Spawn.

Fortunately, I managed to create a different compound that deadened sensory input, most notably hearing. The side-effects are extremely unpleasant and I won't go into them here, and it unfortunately metabolizes too quickly to last an entire night, but I appear to be sleeping more soundly now that I can't hear that blasted screeching so clearly.

I've toyed with the idea of using it in daylight – that screeching never fucking stops - but I'm not sure how I'd explain it if one of the other dwarves notices something's off.

I'll just have to keep at the booze like always, I guess.

16 Sandstone 202

→The fortress attracted no migrants this sea

Clearly, we need far more sparkly crap.

20 Sandstone 202

We don't have much use for mechanics at the moment. As such, I've ordered Mekkia to assist with gem-cutting operations:



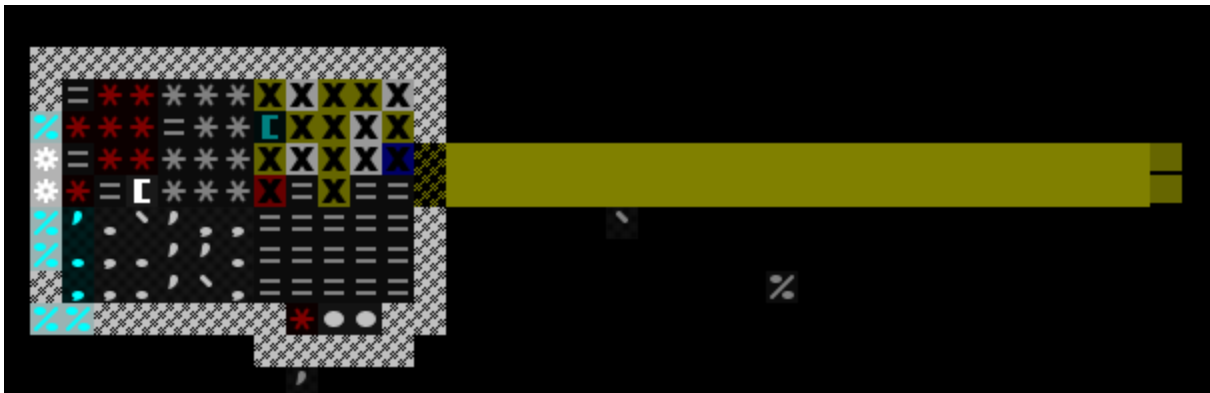
She questioned why I wasn't also helping as well. Really, I'm more suited to a supervisory role, I think.

Also, I've noticed that we seem to have a truly ridiculous amount of caged giant emus. I'm not sure why they're here, but they're more useful to us free, so I've ordered that the cages be set up so that the birds can be released:



Our military is now fully-equipped, so I've suspended armour production temporarily so that our bar stocks can recover. Once they get back up to an acceptable number, we can start forging some spare armour sets for any additional troops that we recruit in the future.

Our old garbage disposal has been blocked off – the lignite is somehow still burning – and I've ordered the digging of a new garbage shaft. This one goes straight into the magma sea, so it should be a bit safer:



24 Sandstone 202



At least you're pretty.

4 Timber 202

The dwarven caravan is scheduled to arrive soon. As our military is now at least somewhat combat-ready, I've ordered that the last bit of hillside be dug out so that the caravanners can access our depot:



There has been some mumbling amongst the other dwarves about how I've doomed the fort with this little act of magnanimity, but I have absolute faith in the combined forces of the F.R.O.G., our military, and the sturdy drawbridge in our entrance. We'll be safe.

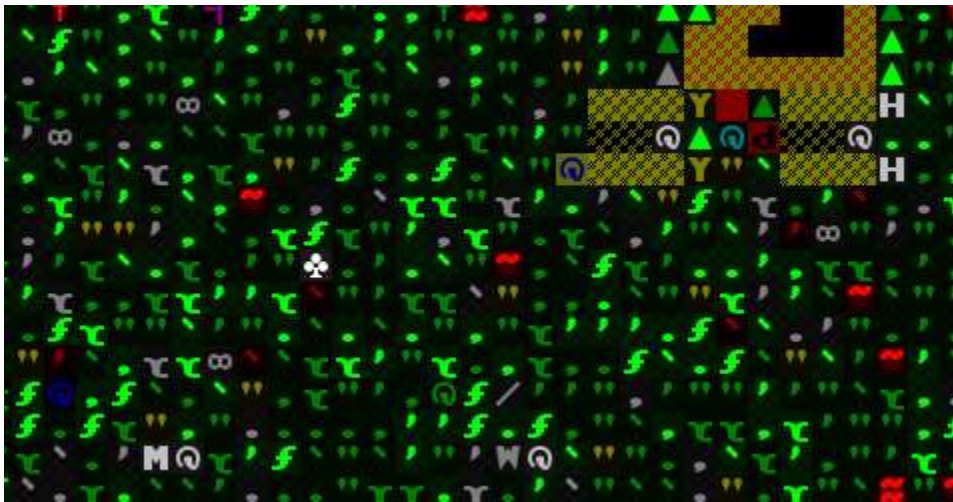
7 Timber 202



No sooner is our entrance completely opened than does one of our idiot workers go sprinting out into the wilderness to pilfer some socks from a corpse. I quickly issued a blanket-forbidding of all items outside, so no harm done, but I'm curious as to why our esteemed overseers didn't order them to be forbidden to start with.

11 Timber 202

A dwarven caravan came today – slightly ahead of schedule, in fact. I'm impressed:



They also brought a diplomat, as expected:



My policy for diplomats arriving to ask potentially-uncomfortable questions regarding the grisly fate of their last caravan is one of truth, openness, and mild amnesiacs slipped into said diplomat's drink. Unfortunately, we don't have any amnesiacs (again, the state of science here is just *appalling*), so we're just going to have to lie slightly.

I'm sure Splint will be able to smooth this over, in any case.

17 Timber 202


```

'Mekkia' Inododdom. Mechanic
"'Mekkia' Gatecloistered"
Peculiarly secretive..., ♀

Strange Mood
Dabbling Grower
Dabbling Gem Cutter
Adequate Mechanic (Rusty)
Novice Swimmer (Rusty)
Adequate Persuader (Rusty)
Competent Negotiator
Skilled Judge of Intent
Competent Liar (Rusty)
Competent Intimidator (Rusty)
Adequate Conversatnlst (Rsty)

```

Mekkia appears to have gone into a strange mood. I put in a request for a phonograph. We could use some tunes in here, and The Master's serenades floating out from the barracks aren't *quitedoing* it for me. Plus, it almost seems as though they're addressed to a wooden pike, though of course the very thought is ridiculous.

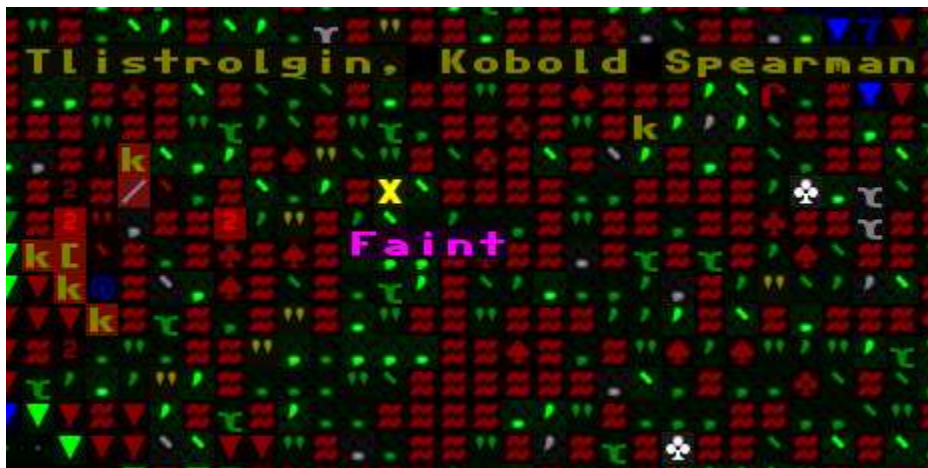
A kobold ambush is sighted by the caravan guards:

```

Jokodochrilmis, Kobold Spearman
"Jokodochrilmis"
♀

```

I send for the military to ward them off. While they're on their way, a lone axe-wielding guard bravely runs in and attempts to take them down on his lonesome:



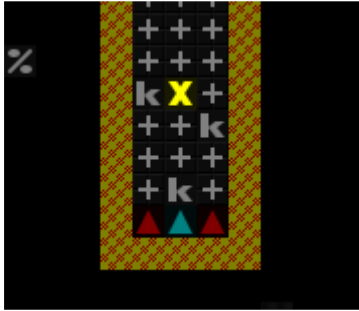
The military is promptly told to return to their training, as their services apparently weren't needed after all.

20 Timber 202

I am very pleased to report that the F.R.O.G. is working exactly as intended, earning a much-needed victory for science in this backwater dump:



It then goes on to catch no fewer than three other thieves:



The abnormal intensity of the kobold invasion this season is intriguing. They've already been kind enough to definitively prove that they aren't a threat, however, so I'm not worried.

Shortly after the thieves escaped, I caught Bombzero attempting to run outside to satisfy her lust for carcasses:



Fortunately, I quickly located the horse skeleton that she's apparently after and forbade it – it was at the bottom of the pit below the old drawbridge, so I had missed it. Unfortunately:



She decides to keep going after it anyways. Again, her single-minded dedication to her task is inspiring, though I am now somewhat questioning her intelligence. She had just about gotten up to the drawbridge pit when she decided that the Spawn on the ledge was too scary and went back inside to get a drink. I suppose even those horrid Spawn are not entirely without merit.

I wasn't sure what we needed from the caravan, so I had Splint order some cloth.

22 Timber 202

I traded a staggering amount of mugs to the caravan in exchange for some booze and wood. We haven't even come close to getting rid of them all. Between the Spawn and these accursed mugs, this place will be the death of me.

I need a drink. I think I'll select something from the caravan. I'm sure they brought *something* stronger than what we have here.

25 Timber 202

It appears that Mekkia's finished gathering materials for her little project:



I'm still hoping for a phonograph, though I'd settle for an electric generator.

Bombzero just ran up to me, crying about how there's no more corpses left for her to butcher:

→ 'Bombzero' Tistaangir, Miner cancels Butcher unrotten nearby item.

I hadn't realized that this was so important to her. I could definitely arrange to have some more corpses produced if it keeps one of our best workers happy and productive.

Finally, it appears the Mountainhomes are suffering from a grievous shortage of drinking containers:

Good	Price	Pr
scepters	196%	--
bone bracelets	132%	!0
blocks	195%	--
cloth	113%	!0
ammunition	174%	--
drinks	170%	--
toys	168%	--
crowns	193%	--
powder	113%	!0
goblets	194%	--

Now I *really* need a drink.
(Oh, and the stuff the traders brought is also crap.)

The winter solstice is approaching. The year is rapidly drawing to a close.

I understand that the tradition is for the current Overseer to hand over their power

to another around New Year's. I must admit, this seems somewhat appealing to me at the moment. The drug I concocted is helping, but I'm still having terrible nightmares... and not always when I'm asleep.

SOLPYRE:

Since Solpyre the dorf is still travelling towards the fort (as far as I know) here is something I made to describe his ongoing journey.

On the way to Spearbreakers there is a cave. Engraved on the wall of the cave is an image of Solpyre the engraver and bogeymen by Solpyre. Solpyre is running. The bogeymen are cackling. The artwork relates to the nighttime adventures of the dwarf

Solpyre in the week before he found this nice safe cave to sleep in.



SPLINT:

9th Limestone, 202. Interim entry.

Mr Frog was insistent on some alleged error in the census records be corrected. I have abided by his request, even if it was a nonsensical one for such a silly slight. Why he's decided to cut the gold nuggets in decorations is beyond me when he knows damn well they'll likely end up on those mugs we have stacked to the ceiling. At this point we may as well have them made our official currency.

He also keeps muttering something about an iteration under his breath when ever the matters of our tools come up. He should really invest in a new room further from the spawn if that thing screeching is keeping him up, as sleep deprivation may be getting to him. Or he's gone mad. Then again, I sleep on the same floor maybe a hundred to two hundred feet from it and it bothers me little, so perhaps I'm the mad one.

9th Sandstone, 202. Interim entry.

Mr Frog said something about the soldiers having to go too far from their training areas to fetch their weaponry, and had me pass along the orders for a new armory to be dug. If anyone had paid any attention, the soldiers were supposed to train by the depot so as to respond to threats to caravans quickly. In hindsight, what with Stova dying and all I admit that wasn't the absolute best plan ever, but I stand by it for rapid reaction sake.

11th Timber, 202. Interim entry.

The caravan arrived today, and according to Frog they got here ahead of schedule. How the hell would he know when they'd arrive? No matter. He wants me to put in an order for cloth, and evidently the capital needs, and Mr Frog will love this, mugs. *Fucking mugs.*

It's official. Mugs are now our currency. I'll see if I can get Mr Frog to ratify that.

- Following is an image of a dwarf and mugs in dimple dye. The dwarf is surrounded by the mugs and is cowering. The artwork relates to the sheer number of mugs accidentally produced by Spearbreakers in the years 200 -201.

MITCHEWAWA:

Mitch's entry to the overseer suggestion box 5th Timber

As much as I know you **love** your mugs, rock mechanisms are a much more efficient trading option. Not only do mechanisms have an ulterior function (high-quality ones make for better traps!), but are also not made in threes. Equal total value to three mugs (and three mugs per rock), the mechanism needs only a third of the storage. And a third of the hauling.

However, considering the shortage of goblets in the Mountainhome, continue making

mugs until this is not the case. Keep up the 'good' work!
Signed, Mitch

MR FROG:

DELTA LEVEL CLEARANCE REQUIRED FOR ACCESS

>CLEARANCE LEVEL: DELTA

>YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED TO ACCEPT THIS TRANSMISSION

>SUBJECT: Experiment Operation HS-2-W1412

>MESSAGE BODY:

Unfortunately, no, I have not been able to test the effects of the neurotoxin in a practical setting. I'll work on that when I get back from this cesspit.

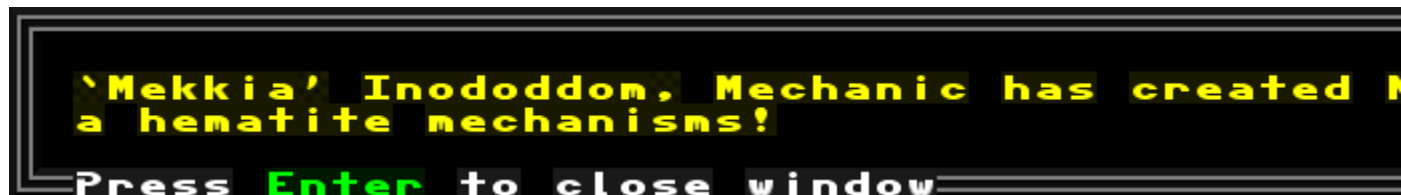
I am well aware that I could just as easily test it on one of the dwarves here, thank you very much. I'd much prefer that the backwards-facing cretins be able to trust me, however. It's easier that way.

Regarding HS-2... once again, I have no idea what sort of information I'm even looking for here. We've already comprehensively documented almost everything about them, from their psychology to their fucking *odour*, yet those bastards in upmanage apparently aren't done with their sick little games. It's become quite clear to me recently that this corporation has become less and less about science and more about a bunch of overempowered manchildren playing god to make up for the fact that their mommies didn't love them enough, or whatever the hell it is that drove them to send me to this little slice of backwoods purgatory filled with morons and mugs and the constant shrieks of a crime against nature that, in my personal opinion, should have simply been allowed to disappear.

MR FROG:

1 Moonstone 202

It seems that Mekkia has finished her project:





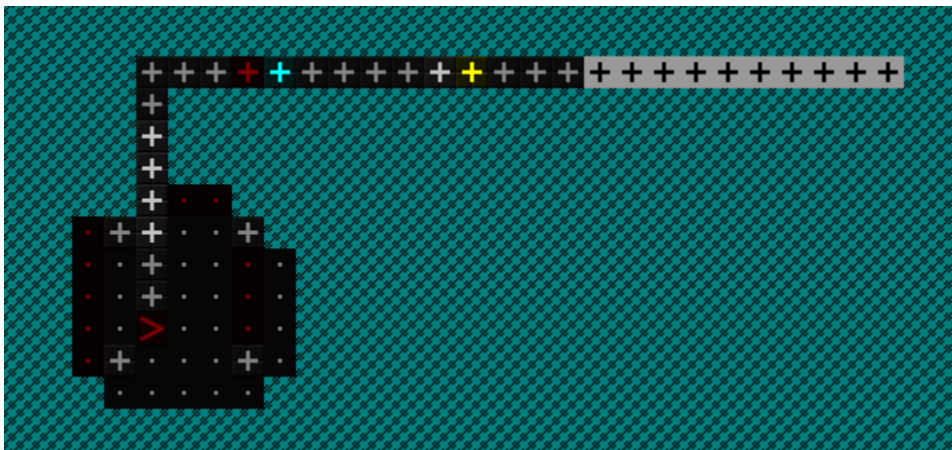
I guess a phonograph was too much to hope for, considering that the greatest technological achievement for the past two centuries for this iteration is apparently the mug.

On top of the fact that the thing is nigh-on-infinitely recursive (it has an image of *itself* on it, and close examination on a microscopic level revealed that the image is perfectly-detailed possibly to the atomic level), I am also questioning whether it's really necessary for a mechanism to be so ornate -- the thing would be more suited to the inside of an art museum than the inside of a machine.

It is worth well over 70,000 of whatever unit of currency these dwarves use, so it should at least be useful for luring in migrants.

6 Moonstone 202

The screeching of our various trapped Spawn is getting on my last nerve. I've ordered construction on the addition to Talvieno's tower to resume so that we can at least do away with the one on the ledge:



I swear to absinthe, I will shut that blasted thing up even if I have to drop ten entire fortresses on it to do so.

8 Moonstone 202



Unbelievable. It seems that Fischer took a horse lung into his bedroom and then just left it there to rot. Absolutely *disgusting*. I understand that these dwarves are relatively-primitive – I’ve had that fact beaten into me over the course of the last year -- but I’ve really come to expect more from them than *this*. Fortunately, the doors here are reasonably airtight, so we at least don’t have to smell the mess.

13 Moonstone 202

ARRRRGH!



Apparently, I’ll have to keep on listening to that stupid thing, because – even though it has literally no means of accessing anyone – it’s just too scary for our poor little cretins to come within a mile of without completely losing their meagre wits out of fear.

It seems any construction done must occur far enough away from the abomination for our little dwarves to not see it. I’ll think of something.

In other news, I’ve ordered a new hospital area dug around the well so that our injured can have their wounds cleaned in a timely fashion:



15 Moonstone 202

It think I've come up with a new solution for the stranded Spawn. First, we'll need to clear some land so that our miners can dig channels:



20 Moonstone 202

When I woke up early this morning, I could almost swear that I saw Talvieno peeking through the door at me. I was still half-asleep, so I'm not really sure.

25 Moonstone 202



The land has been cleared and the channels has been dug. We now have a safe location from which to open fire at the Spawn.

Talvieno's swirly walls are in the way, however, so I've ordered our engravers to carve some fortifications into it.

While I do engrave for a hobby and have a fair amount of skill, I won't be assisting in this endeavour. There are some vital tasks that need my attention at the moment:

'Talvieno'	Dorenarzes, expedition leader	leer
'Mr Frog'	Spishabthan, Mechanic	Store
'Mekkia'	Inododdon, Mechanic	Cut r

27 Moonstone 202

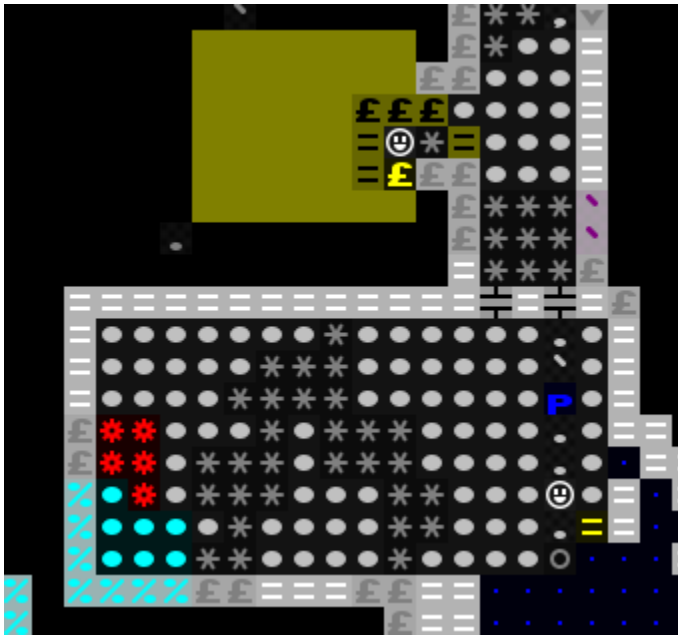
→ 'Mitchewawa' Istraemoth, Masondorf cancels
Interrupted by Holistic Spawn Wrestler.
'Mitchewawa' Istraemoth, Masondorf cancels
Interrupted by Holistic Spawn Wrestler.
'Rosan' Oledbikdá, Smithdorf cancels Carve
Holistic Spawn Wrestler.
'Mitchewawa' Istraemoth, Masondorf cancels
Interrupted by Holistic Spawn Wrestler.

I give up. I fucking *give up*. I have tried to explain to these little morons, slowly and carefully, that there's nothing to be afraid of, that the Spawn using black magic to transform dwarves who look at them directly is an urban legend, and that the Spawn transformation is a well-documented viral effect transmitted through direct contact between the Spawn's mouthparts and the victim's bloodstream, but they don't believe my "fairy tales", as they call them. These damned rustics will be the death of me. I can't wait to get out of here.

1 Opal 202

I've realized that we have no form of antiseptic anywhere in this fortress. While these rednecks obviously haven't developed any refined means of sterilization, we should at least be able to produce soap. I've assigned two medical dwarves to potash and lye production, Sus to actually produce the soap, and Talvieno to press rock nuts into oil (she, at least, seemed more than happy to assist in this operation).

I've issued some work orders to Splint. While he fills out the paperwork, we'll work on getting the needed facilities set up:



7 Opal 202

I can't get away from the sound of Ashsaber's and Softa's screeches coming up from the quarantine cells. I think that I hate it even more than the noises from the damned Spawn up on the ledge (as nice as Talvieno is, I don't think I'll ever forgive her for getting the stupid thing stuck there, accidentally or not).

To my knowledge, the transformation is completely-irreversible – the infection permanently alters the victim's biological makeup. Attempts at developing a cure *had* been made... some things, I think, should not be explained in detail. I think it's telling that the reason for the research into finding a cure being called off was fear of the researchers suffering permanent emotional and psychological damage.

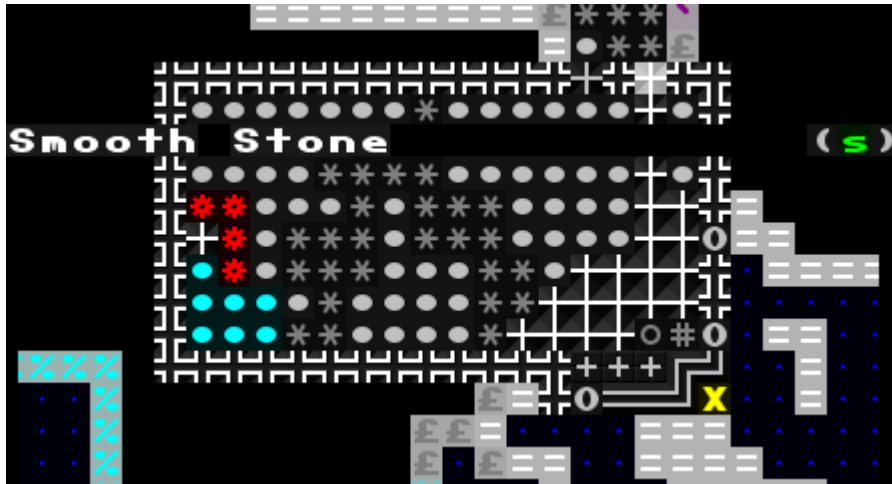
There's still hope, I suppose. Not much. But it's there.

15 Opal 202

Slightly embarrassing thing today – I had not considered that we would need jugs to store the rock nut oil in. I'm not sure why we can't just use some of the hundreds of mugs around here instead, but in any case I've ordered some stone jugs to be produced.

17 Opal 202

I've ordered that our new hospital area be smoothed:



It's a bit frivolous, but it's best to communicate to our patients that our healthcare facilities are of the highest quality possible with the means that are available to us.

While, again, I am perfectly capable of assisting in this task, I really feel that it's best that I take some time off:

'Talvieno' Dorenarzes, expedition leader	On Br
'Mr Frog' Spishabtham, Mechanic	Cut r
'Mekkia' Inododdon, Mechanic	

The strain of being the Overseer combined with the horrible living conditions here are taking a very real toll on me, I feel. Fortunately, I only have to keep at this for another month.

19 Opal 202

Sus has been running back and forth upstairs through the halls to the main wood stockpile even though there's a smaller pile located right next to the wood furnace.

I can't even guess at his motives, but I've ordered the offending stockpile to be sealed-off for now:



He seems to be using the closer pile now, so that's sorted out.

Our iron stocks have already been refilled to an acceptable level (whatever I may say about the dwarves here, they at least work quickly), so I've ordered our forges to resume full equipment production for now. I'm also having them begin production of proper breastplates.

In military matters, I seem to have mistakenly assigned Zuglarr to a hammer squad even though he has a great deal of skill with a pike. This has been rectified. The slow pace of our recruits' training is somewhat worrying, but we should be able to get by.

26 Opal 202

I apparently don't know the first thing about how they make soap here.

I was receiving complaints from Talvieno about how she didn't have anything to press oil out of. I got a bit angry with her and told her that we have over 180 rock nuts and that she should probably try using those.

Apparently, you have to first have the nuts ground into a paste at a quern before they can be pressed.

I've ordered a quern to be produced at the mason's and assigned Kannan to milling duty.

I find my complete ignorance regarding the workings of these dwarves' more-primitive technology to be both extremely embarrassing and slightly poetic. I suppose I've been a bit harsh in my judgment of them, though their lack of magnetic accelerators to blast these stupid Spawn into oblivion will always be a mark against them in my eyes.

3 Obsidian 202

The slow pace of work in the hospital is irritating me, so I've decided to pitch in, potential nervous breakdowns be damned:



9 Obsidian 202

I must admit to being fascinated by the frequent bloody rains around here, though it is well outside of my field of expertise and in any case I won't be able to get any work done what with all the bloody noise around here. I'll have to see about organizing a formal scientific inquiry when I get back.

17 Obsidian 202

We seem to have gotten the mug situation more-or-less under control:



While we admittedly still have hundreds of the vile things, they're at least tucked away into bins where I don't have to look at them.

19 Obsidian 202

Another fallen dwarf has risen from the grave:



This one certainly took its time – from what I understand, this dwarf was among those that died in the Spawn attack over a year ago, during Talvieno's reign.

I've arranged for another animal to be thrown into Ashsaber's cell:



This one is far larger than the previous test subject, so it should hopefully keep him occupied long enough to give me something of a reprieve from the Spawn's awful cries.

The animal is apprehended and dragged to the pit, after which it is thrown in:



I was concerned that the greater mass of the animal would cause it to become grievously injured upon impact, but it was only briefly stunned:



Ashsaber tears into his prey immediately, biting its neck and leg before engaging in a manoeuvre which will be burned into my mind for all eternity:

→The sergeant bites The Stray Giant Emu in the neck!
 The sergeant latches on firmly!
 The Stray Giant Emu gives in to pain.
 The sergeant shakes The Stray Giant Emu and
 severed part sails off in an arc!
 The tongue is ripped away and remains in the air!

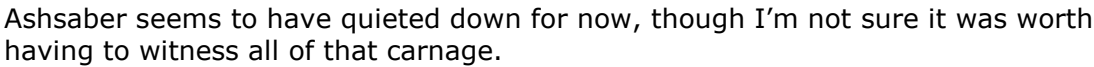
Despite the fact that the animal is unconscious and thus unable to defend itself, its great size and accompanying cranial thickness appears to be making it difficult for Ashsaber to land a killing strike:

→The sergeant claws The Stray Giant Emu in t
 right hand, tearing the muscle!
 The sergeant bites The Stray Giant Emu in t
 bruising the muscle!
 The sergeant latches on firmly!
 The sergeant shakes The Stray Giant Emu ar
 the head's skin!
 The sergeant bites The Stray Giant Emu in t
 bruising the muscle!
 The sergeant latches on firmly!
 The sergeant shakes The Stray Giant Emu ar
 the head's skin!
 The sergeant bites The Stray Giant Emu in t
 bruising the muscle!
 The sergeant latches on firmly!

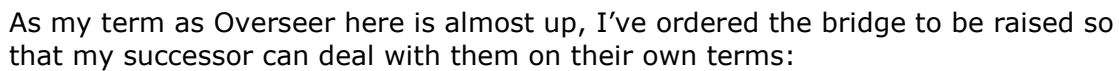
It was a long, grisly fight – though I suppose “fight” isn’t quite the right word for it.
 The animal sustained every sort of injury imaginable save for that one crucial strike
 to the brain:

Stray Giant Emu (Tame)		
upper body		Unconscious
lower body		Exhausted
neck		
head		Nauseous
right upper leg		
left upper leg		
right lower leg		Pale
left lower leg		
right foot		
left foot		
right wing		
left wing		
right eye		
left lung		
guts		

After having all of the soft tissue in its body thoroughly pulped, the animal finally
 dies from blood loss:



The F.R.O.G has detected a squad of concealed goblins coming in to ambush:





The bridge goes up long before the goblins can get in. Again, I'll leave it up to the next overseer to deal with them, whoever they turn out to be. I don't really know any of the dwarves here well enough to distinguish which would be the best candidate, and I really wouldn't leave any of them in charge of anything more important than a rock nut, so I'll just draw a name out of a hat.

Our hospital isn't yet furnished or even officially designated as such, but that'll be simple enough for the next overseer to see to themselves. We're not done with soap production either, though I set it up so that it should continue along by itself without need for further management.

I can't say I'll really miss being in charge of this hellpit. Perhaps now I'll finally be able to relax somewhat. I'm now fairly certain that I will not be called back out of here anytime soon, so I suppose I'll just have to make myself comfortable.

[[Talvieno's note: It was a week and a half between this update and the next one, by overseer Draigean. Everyone kept themselves occupied with the following journal entries and artwork (and many semi-offtopic discussions, ranging from: which splats bigger, a dwarf or an emu; to spawn lingerie).]]

MITCHEWAWA:

Journal of Mitch, 27th of Moonstone

I saw a Spawn in the flesh today, while carving out fortifications. And it saw me. Its' eyes peered into my **soul**. The saliva covering its maw glimmered in the sun, and in the flash of light I saw horrible things. An army of Holistic, rising from silt, seething with foul energies that poison the sky. Our fortress under a black sun, raining blood up to our ankles. Great bone claws clashing with iron, steel and stone. The death of **hundreds** in a matter of days, screaming of both dwarven and not.

I dropped my chisel and ran, of course. So did others, who wont speak of what they saw. Maybe they did not see anything? If I were in Frogs' shoes, I would have called us, 'Dipshit dissident elves' instead of 'morons and cowards'. But **he** didn't see the Spawn, nor did he see a vision.

I've been doing some asking around, and they seem to be able to withstand terrible blows. Even missing limbs, they appear to be able to hop using only the projection of their jaws. The overseers sought spears to counter them; but for what use are piercing their organs, of which spears are so proficient, when they can live without them? Nay, blunt weapons are the way to victory. Nothing can move with a shattered spine.

Methinks we need to build a proper defence, but they simply crush weapon-traps beneath their feet of bone. Perhaps we should breach the caverns, and Armok willing, capture a giant cave spider to tie them down on top of rows and rows of masterwork blunt rock weaponry?

PS. Heard a lot of mention about 'manamaids'. I don't know what the hell that is, but I get the feeling I don't want to.

MR FROG:

Journal of Mr Frog
Entry #3001

As expected, I found no fewer than 200 surveillance devices concealed in various locations inside the fortress. It seems that our dear friends in upmanage are very concerned with keeping tabs on the fortress's activities.

This does raise the question of why, exactly, they need me to be here when they clearly can already survey the fortress's activities in great detail. Something else interesting is the fact that many of the devices were placed in locations that had been very recently dug out. This could suggest that somebody in the fortress is actively placing them.

I am now thinking back to when I thought I saw Talvieno looking into my bedroom. It was most likely nothing, but I wouldn't be surprised if she's somehow involved. I think I should inquire more carefully into the whereabouts of this Joseph character.

In any case, it seems that I may not be here for quite the reasons that I thought I am. I may not end up going back for a long while.

TALVIENO:

Journal of Ms Talvi Diamondknight, unknown date

I saw Mr Frog again today (he don't like it when I say a period, so I been careful to watch how I speaks to him in public)... Hes so dreamy... And so smart, too. Why, sometimes, gazin at him from across the room while we make mechanisms... I start to think he might almost be from another world... He's so head and shoulder 'bove everybody else and all...

Couple nights back, I was watchin him like I always do, an' he almost saw me. not sure if he did... he don't know it yet, but I made him a spot to sleep in my cavy room... in my bed next to me... I cain't find a way t' tell im, but I'll thinka somethin'... my gods, he's so strong... mmm... I mean, Joseph and I have had some pretty rough fun usselves at night in m' bed, but Mr Frog, now...

I had a dream, bout a week back... Mr Frog was comin over the hill, just come back from killin over eleventy-seven barbarians... with his bare hands, muscles bulgin' and all... anyhow, he was comin' over the hill, riding an ox... he had a cloak made out of socks... my gods, it was gorgeous! Oh, but Mr Frog outshone them all... And he stopped by me and looked down, sayin', "Hey there, lil' lady. I got somethin' for you." And he took out a cavy out of his pack! It was so cute! But I put it down, cause he picked me up in his arms... and as the blood rained down before us, we kissed... gods, it was so romantic... and then... we went to my cavy room... and...

the text ends here in a mess of scribbles overdrawn with a large heart symbol

[[Talvieno's note: The following entry was posted after Draignean's first post. I've transferred it here for your reading convenience.]]

MR FROG:

Entry #3010

Talvieno showed me into her room the other day. Apparently, she had misplaced something, and needed my help looking for it. There wasn't anything that needed my attention at the moment, so I acquiesced.

That isn't what's interesting, however.

While I was in there, I'm very sure that I saw the corner of... something black... sticking out from the shadows under her bed. Talvieno, who was lying on her bed at the time (as I have come to expect from these dwarves, she was wasting time adjusting her brassiere or some such nonsense when she could have been assisting with searching for whatever it was that she misplaced) quickly noticed and hopped onto the ground, not-so-discretely kicking the *something* back under as she did so.

I decided it was best not to let on that I had seen... whatever it was that she apparently doesn't want me to see. She quickly ushered me out of the room after that. I suppose she must have found whatever she had been looking for (she never did specify what it was she had lost).

I'd think that the thing that I saw was a plastic-cased device of some sort if I didn't know full well that these hillbillies don't have anywhere near the tech required. It was probably just an obsidian slab with a picture of a cavy engraved or some such. Still, I am curious.

I did notice the presence of what appeared to be a word-a-day calendar on her wall. I suppose it's nice that these dwarves are making an effort to embrace culture.

[[Talvieno's note: manamaids are sort of (but not really) a running gag - a supposed addition for the sequel. It's basically a cross between a manamaid and a mermaid, and it's supposed to be hideous enough to make you lose consciousness. At this point in the thread, it was determined that it was the fault of Mr Frog's dwarf.]]

MR FROG:

EXPLANATION OF MANAMAIDS

The manamaids are what happen when a TinyChat meetup is allowed to continue far too late into the night for any of its participants to remain remotely-coherent and subsequently goes horribly, *horribly* off-the-rails.

First, think of a manatee. This should be easy and painless, as manatees are amusing and loveable. Now, swap its lower body with a fish tail -- or simply glue sequins onto the existing lower body, as the results should be pretty much the same.

Now add a cape, a fetishized Hallowe'en costume of your choice, and burlesque skills so brutal that viewers literally get put into a catatonic state, and you've got yourself a manamaid.

...We're sorry?

BOMBZERO:

Journal of Bombzero, Miner and mug maker.

I think i heard muttering that we were low on mugs, obviously the overseer is incompetent, as mugs are very, very, very, **very, very, VERY** important to our economy.

on a less horrific note, a dog was nearly killed when the military risked their life to get that abomination away from our old front gate.

MR FROG:

@bombzero:

For some reason, I imagined Bombzero's journal to read something like this:

Journal of Bombzero

20 Obsidian 202

I'm out of corpses. i wish we still had some. i like corpses, they're fun to take apart and you get meat after you're done. some days i want to sit at the butcher's shop

and cut things up all day long. I like peeling the skin off, it reminds me of when mama gave me that pretty box on the solstice and when I took its clothes off there was another box inside. i get the tingling in my insides whenever i slice through the tough things tying the soft stuff to the bones. it feels so nice. Sometimes when the corpse is really ripe i can poke its tummy with my pickaxe and the guts shoot out and it's like they're streamers and i'm at a birthday party, also sometimes there's little white crawlies and it makes me so happy that they're having fun too and we're all having a corpse party together.

the white crawlies and me are best friends. I like to show them the mugs i made so they can see that I'm working hard. they get very sad when i'm not working so i make sure i'm always doing something. sometimes I get tired, but i try not to sleep because i don't want them to be sad.

I think i'm gonna ask Mr Frog to make some more corpses so that the crawlies won't get upset. i guess I could take something apart while it's alive but it's hard to make them stay still.

I wonder if you can make mugs out of corpses? i'm sure that would make the crawlies very happy.

(bombzero): @ Mr Frog, hmm... sounds about right, ill have to wait till my turn to cross-reference my status screen with what other people have said about my character up till then.

[[Talvieno's note: It was suggested that we produce a single set of adamantine mugs.]]

TALVIENO:

YES! One set of adamantine mugs! Perfection at its finest.

*Oh Adamantine Mug, alight
With glint of dragonfire I see
Your boundless beauty, and I'd fight
Until I die for thee
- a dwarf of Spearbreakers*

MR FROG:

Quote from: Talvieno on March 09, 2012, 01:00:25 pm

And **[Mr Frog]**, you're going to need to remake the coat of arms - it's in need of a mug or two.

Ask, and you shall receive:



...I tried?

(Draigneane): Our motto is Holy Shit?
Yeah, I guess that fits.

(Talviano): Mr Frog, the coat of arms is proudly displayed on page one, and you got the motto perfectly. lol Half the people who glanced into this thread uttered those exact words (different language) in their first post. (okay, maybe less than that, but it was recurrent enough to merit notice.)

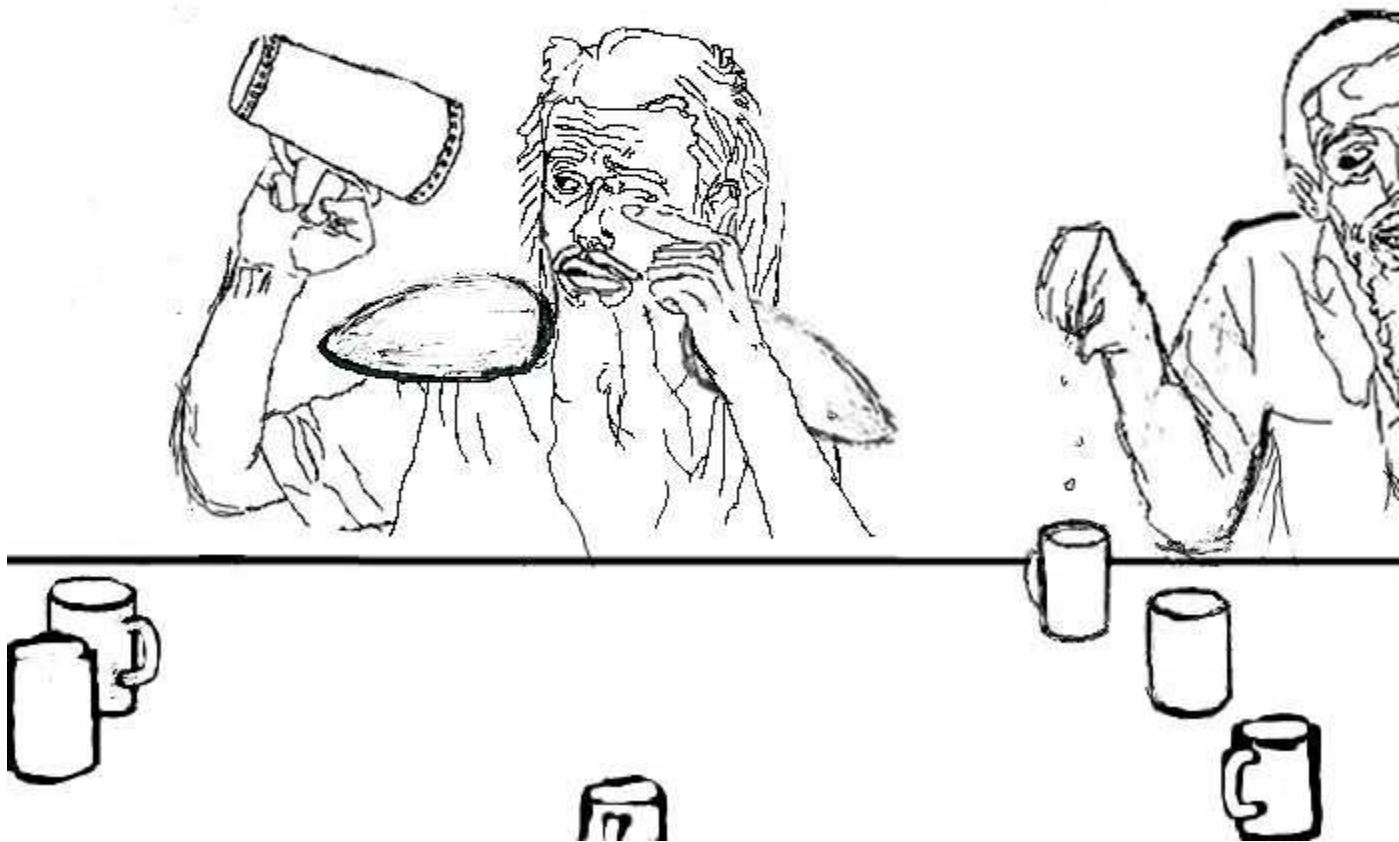
(bombzero): nice, putting holy shit in English would have been boring...

(Mr Frog): I don't know Latin, so I just hoped that French would be close enough
:p

(bombzero): If I remember correctly, holy shit sounds better in French anyways.

[[Talvieno's note: This discussion got derailed into the bounds of "what would make the best ballistae trap". As would be expected, the ballistae trap was never built. As a side note, the Spearbreakers thread is derailed very, very frequently, often with hilarious, quoteworthy results.]]

SOLPYRE:



I don't think I'm ever going to do one this detailed again after this, its just to much work for one pic.

That's Mr Frog on the right and SolPyre dorf on the left.

TERRAHEX:

[[Talvieno's note: Terrahex wrote this entry assuming a dwarf would be available. It used to be farther down, but I've moved it to the correct position in the timeline.]]

Hey Diary!

You don't know me, but my name is Terrahex. I found you on the dirty floor. You have this really nice cover and binding and paper pages, too, and I thought that it would be a shame to let you get dirty on the dirty dirt floor. Someone must have dropped you or misplaced you because you're only half full. I hope we can be great friends!

You're not mine though, so I have to find your owner and return you. Maybe your owner can be my friend, too!

Nobody really notices me, but I've been here awhile. I'm just kinda shy. My name wasn't even on the census for the longest time! I've only recently gotten the courage to go into Splint's office while he was doing manger-y things. He didn't notice me come in, and I didn't want to interrupt any of his important duties. I just kinda wrote my name on the list of resident dwarves while he wasn't looking and ran out as fast as I could. He's so friendly. I hope he didn't think I was weird. I don't want people to not like me.

Hey Diary! It's me again!

I didn't find your owner yet, but I'm working on it. Today I was going to make an announcement at breakfast about me finding you, but when I was planning on what to say, I started to get light-headed at the thought of so many people listening to me. Then I kind of just fainted into my plump helmet cereal instead. It's lucky that I forgot to pour wine in before I fainted because then it would have gotten all soggy.

Everyone was gone when I woke up except for some cavies in the corner fighting over some scraps of plump helmet, so I made the announcement to them instead. I don't think they cared, but I must remain hopeful. Plus, it's mean to think bad thoughts about them like that.

I also visited Spawny today! You don't know her, but she's really nice even though she looks weird and eats dwarves. She's been stuck up on a ledge for a year with the skeleton of a merchant to keep her company. She complains about hunger sometimes, so I toss her some food. She's hard to understand, but she has a language just like we do. She loves to tell me stories, and I tell her about life in the fortress. She's my best friend ever!

Today she told me about how her mommy, Holistic Detective, used to live in another world and how Armok took her with him when he reformed the world. I didn't really understand it, but the two fight occasionally now, causing their children to fight as well. I wish that they'd stop fighting.

Spawny apparently came here to find a cure to the disease that Armok struck Holistic Detective with in anger. She came here to find a cure for her mommy's sickness and wound up being stranded on a ledge that is periodically being rained blood upon.

[on the page is a well-drawn image of a Spawn of Holistic and Terrahex the dwarf by Terrahex the dwarf. The Spawn of Holistic is smiling. The dwarf Terrahex is hard to

notice. This artwork relates to the friendship of Terrahex the dwarf and "Spawnny" the Spawn of Holistic in the year 203]

Dear Diary,

Today I was looking for a place to engrave a notification on the wall that I had found you, but nearly every inch of the fortress is filled with engravings of a missing cavy by Miss Talvi. She used to be the overseer of the fortress, but nowadays she spends her time following around Mr Frog or with cavies. I don't know how she gets work done, but she does.

Anyway, the sheer number of missing engravings is impressive in the least, but I had a hard time finding a place for myself. Eventually I found a blank wall behind a large pile of mugs. I engraved a picture of you on it and put information on it, too. It didn't even look half bad!

I didn't have anywhere to put the displaced mugs so I just put them back where they were. I couldn't leave them on the ground because while I was engraving, Mr Frog tripped over them and muttered something sour about the number of cups in the fortress. I was going to say I was sorry, but my words caught in my mouth. I didn't want him to think I meant to trip him. I'm not rude or anything! Eventually I was able to get an "I'm sorry" out, and that was quickly followed by the contents of my stomach (probably unrelated). He was long gone by then, but it's the thought that counts.

Don't tell anyone, but I'm actually tempted to peak at the first entries to find out who your owner is, but that's a violation of privacy. I could never do that!

[[Talvieno's note: Draignean's dwarf became considered the dwarven version of Zapp Brannigan from Futurama.]]

DRAIGNEAN:

This is the Journal of Draignean Firstmoss, it is bound between two heavy sheets of slate. The front piece of slate is engraved with the legend 'Draignean's Big Book of'.

The words are so large that no other words can be engraved on the front of the book, leaving the title perpetually incomplete.

Dwarf Date, 203.01-1. My greatness has finally been recognized officially! The former overseer –yes journal, former overseer- Mr. Frog called me into his office to announce that he had chosen me as his successor! My obvious qualities of bravery, intellect, and eloquence cannot be compared to that of other dwarves...

It would appear my mother underestimated my abilities gravely when she said I would make a good cheese maker. HEAR THAT MOMMY! YOU WERE WRONG!

Dwarf Date, 203.01-3 I awoke this morning to the unusual affair of having an emu in my bed. I realize that the sheer power of my animal magnetism has a powerful draw on such creatures, but I was forced to tell her that I wasn't interested, right now I was looking for someone with a little less neck.

To prevent further embarrassing incidents I've made my first official mandate by ordering every animal into a field or into a cage. I will miss my crowd of emu fan-girls, but those beaks are rather a bit hard.

Dwarf Date 203.01-6 Though I mourn Catten's lost foot I do not regret the decision to begin my career on a high note by embarking in a foolish mission to drive the thrice damned child of a fallen hero off of a high ledge where it isn't hurting anyone. It was exactly the kind of thing that will make my name immortal.

In secret I ordered a miner to dig a thin shaft behind the spawn, leaving only a thin veil of soft earth between it and the fortress. Then, in equal secrecy, I ordered the assemblage of our entire military.

After no one arrived I re-ordered their appearance with less secrecy. (Apparently messenger emu are not used for a reason, who knew?) This time they assembled quickly, believing that this was a tactic meeting they cramming into the narrow tunnel in a confused mass of sweaty dwarves.

"As you know," I announced, my perfect voice ringing out across the horde of dwarves and war dogs, *"the key factor in any battle is the element of surprise."* As I spoke I motioned for the miner to drive his pick through the remaining veil of earth that separated us from the spawn.

"SURPRISE"

The resulting battle was slow to start. The spawn stared at us, its mouth and lower body agape in surprise. (At least I think it was surprise, hard to tell on those buggers.) My troops stared back. The air was thick with tension.

My noble dog (named catten, get it journal? A dog named catten?*) was the first to recover, leaping forwards to bite the vicious spawn, but a single brutal swipe of the Spawn's talons removed my poor Catten's foot from her leg. Her loss, however, was not in vain, for she galvanized the men (and manly women) into action. In moments the spawn was swarmed under a writhing mass of dwarves.

The first of our blows against it split its skull down the middle, the next stroke was a shield bash that caved the side of the thing's head in, then The Master decided to do something rather strange. (Perhaps in vengeance for his own earlier bite wounds.)



The battle concluded at long last when HARD landed a strong bash that toppled the spawn back off the ledge, shattering its bones many feet below.

The men cheered in victory and hit me roughly as a sign of camaraderie (word a day calendar), by Armok did a lot of them feel camaraderie for me that day. My face is still sore from their camaraderie.

Dwarf Date 203.01-8 Through senses that were hitherto (I love this calendar!) unknown to me I was able to tell that the spawn had been able to clamber out of its pit and wander off the edge of the map.

Beardsense, that's what I'll call this new power...

Dwarf Date 203.01-13 Dwarves under my command have died today, thankfully they were both friends so they've been saved the trouble of mourning each other. It happened when I was going out on an expedition to pick some wildflowers for my hair, something that I was told was impossible because of a bunch of greenskins camped outside.

Furious that a bunch of measly goblins were preventing me from my own damn field of, admittedly bloody, wildflowers I ordered our beleaguered (I'm going to have to get dozen of these things when the next caravan arrives) soldiers to assemble in front of the gate, minutes before I ordered the very gate to be lowered.

The battle was fierce, pikes stabbed in all directions, hammers smashed greenskin skulls, but we were invincible. The only little niggle was that one of the Goblins didn't get the invincibility memo, flicking his silver whip-thing through HARD and Obok's

heads as fast as lightning.

I remember feeling a deep sorrow as I saw their bodies fall to the floor, I had liked HARD's socks, and it was going to be a pain to get his brain juice of them.

The goblin was killed at long last when one of the attack dogs ripped his throat out and he bled death, further adding to the necessity of cleaning the clothes of Obok and HARD before I put them to good use.

It seemed that the very instant we finished fighting, the emu that Mr. Frog decided to put into the ceiling started screaming again. My Beardsense informed me that there were a further five goblins coming through the fortress, probably to have strong words about their brothers that we had just brutally murdered.

That didn't change the fact that it was time for lunch.

Everyone took five and wandered back down the halls to get a plump helmet, everyone except for me that is. I had managed to tangle my pike through my shirt whilst petting Catten for his good work, pulling it over my head and rendering my keen dwarfsight useless. Forced to rely on my Beardsense I wandered through the halls, bumping my pike into the walls and other objects as I walked and struggled to disentangle my pike from my shirt at the same time. Eventually the objects I was bumping into started howling in pain, I apologized profusely and tried to get out of the way, only to poke another soft thing. I kept on that way for a few minutes, jumping around left and right, unable to see who in red sticky circus it was I was bumping into.



Using my innate cunning I was at last able to pull my shirt down over my body and free my pike, allowing me to see the poor people I'd been poking. Thankfully my dear journal, they were merely the goblins I had been warned about, and after my incredible display of skill and transdorfinic ability they were on the run. Well, except for the dead one, he stayed right where he was.

Dwarf Date 203.01-24 After taking a long and well deserved rest I've decided to give everyone a questionnaire about what they can do, what they are doing, and what they want to be. It took a while, but after reviewing the results I was able to toss them into the magma forges and tell everyone what I thought they should be.

There were a great many gestures of camaraderie that day.

Dwarf Date 203.02-1 I've learned of the discovery of a vast pillar of adamantite beneath our fortress, appalled that such an incredible resource was going to waste I have immediately ordered it to be mined out.

Superstitious mumblers have levied some threats, but everyone with a half a brain knows that the circus is a myth, exactly like the spawn locked away in our holding cells.

Dwarf Date 203.02-2 Me and The Master have had a bit of an argument recently, mostly over that overgrown toothpick he's gotten so fond of. The bloody dwarf just kept going on about the grain and how it felt under his hands, I do believe that he's going to end up naming the damn thing and marrying it one day.



The argument came to blows, but it was really something that we should consider an impromptu sparring match for the purposes of crime and justice.



That's what I'm telling everyone anyway.

Dwarf Date 203.02-7 I've named myself mayor! The position is twice as prestigious as expedition leader, and I'm supposed to get a generous set of rooms to go with my new job.

Strange. I already feel myself growing unhappy that I don't have those rooms.

Dwarf Date 203.02-14 Err, I went a bit out of my head there for a bit, and I think I may be a wanted criminal now... I was walking back to patrol the woodland with my mug class battalion (isn't that fancy sounding?) when I stopped in front of the old blood spattered bridge, realizing that I'd gone and forgotten to grab those sock's off HARD's body before the blood dried into them.

All of that on top with not receiving any news about my dear mother's condition from the mountainhomes (she's been dead for about a year now, but I'm hopeful) made me go a little crazy for a bit. I picked up HARD's body and threw it into the wall, clear away from the blessed socks. Then I might have dealt a few blows to the critical parts of the Bridge's mechanisms.



Personally I blame the sudden collapse on stone fatigue, but do the mason's listen? Nooo.

Dwarf Date 203.02-18 By Armok's infinite beard, Migrants! A good steady chain of twenty dwarves and two traders (No one knows why they're here and nobody has had a bit of luck getting them to do anything) has brought new life to our fortress.

Of course the lack of a functional bridge has put a bit of a damper on things, forcing me to dig a temporary side passage out of the fort so they could come inside.

Dwarf Date 203.02-24 I ran into Ashsaber the Second the other day, apparently the man came to visit his relative. A man who, I'm told, turned into a spawn earlier. Considering the fact that the spawn are a myth I was able to deduce that Ashsaber II's brother was in fact a myth to begin with. He gave me a friendly pat on the face when I informed of this, a token of his esteem for my boundless intelligence, but I di-dress. (MUST FIND NEW CALENDAR. The spilled wine on this one makes it hard to read.) Ashsaber the second's problem was that he felt he was starving to death, I told him that those feelings were simply not possible, but, compassionate soul that I am, asked him to check with our records keeper.

Food Stores:	1760
Meat	None
Fish	None
Plant	None
Seeds	956
Drink	618
Other	186

The news that we are in fact out of food was rather disturbing, but I've cleverly counteracted the dastardly plot of our stomachs by enacting a stringent rationing plan. I estimate that this measure alone will stretch our supplies of nothing out into the next year.

Splint, however, didn't think that measure was good enough, and he's started slaughtering some of our emus for meat. What will the man think of trying to eat next, mugs?

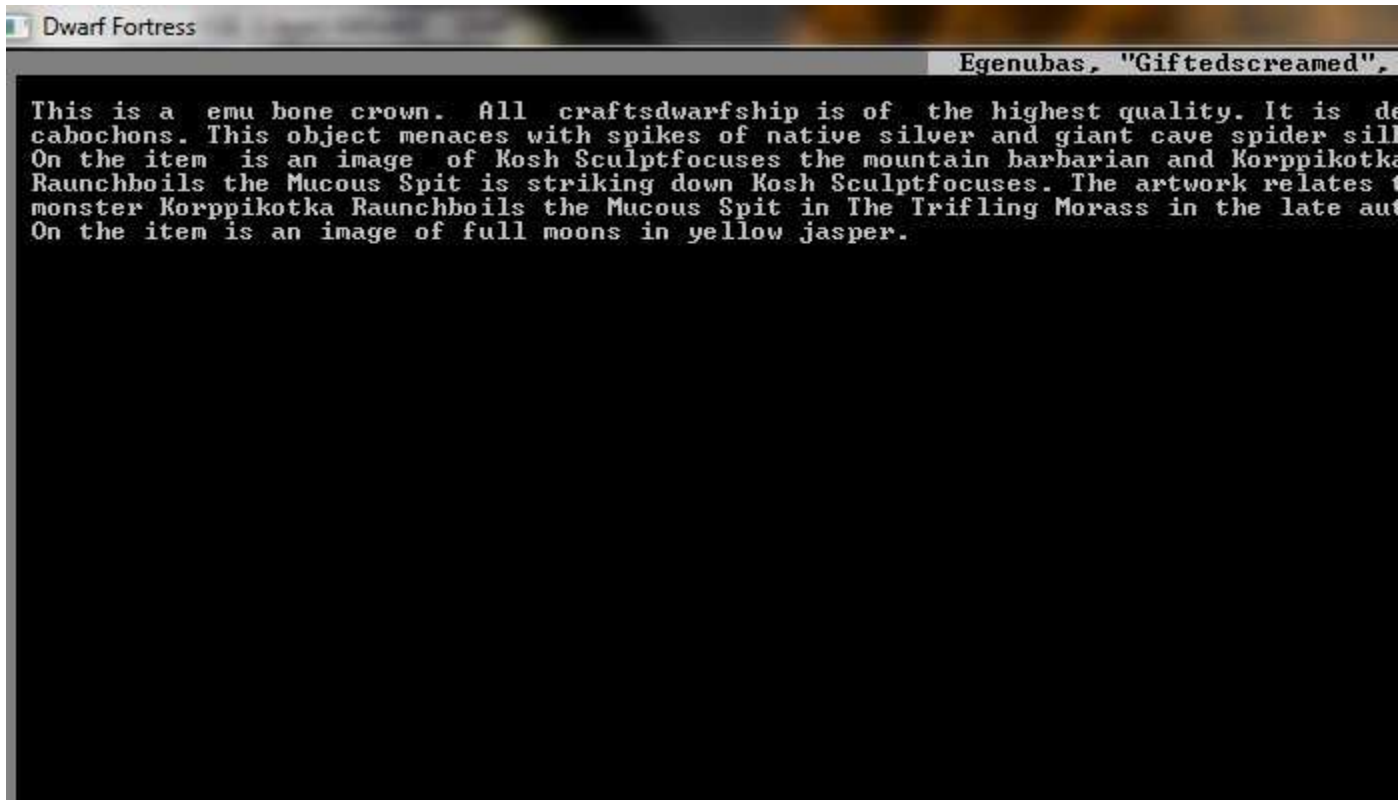
Dwarf Date 203.3-3 Mosia has fallen into a strange mood, I don't know why and I really wouldn't care except for the fact that she's taken up residence in one of the workshops that I've ordered moved. How on earth are we to compete in the cross-fortress strange mandate races if people keep sitting in the things we're trying to move?

Well, that frustration aside, she has brought together a rather unusual set of materials.



Dwarf Date 203.3-5 After gathering yellow jaspers and some GCS silk we had lying around Mosia has commenced work on her little project, hopefully something nice. A matching set of mugs would be good.

Dwarf Date 203.3-10 Mosia has completed her work, it's nice enough I suppose, but for some reason I can't seem to wear it. What good is a crown if the rightful leader of this citadel can't wear it?



Dwarf Date 203.3-14 An elven caravan has arrived. I'd be more excited my dear journal, but I have no idea what they would have that is any use to us. Trading commenced slowly, we gave them a couple mugs in exchange for food, wood, leather, and another word a day calendar for me. (Wine stains are impossible to get out of goblin leather pages)

Dwarf Date 203.3-20 We have fallen under attack, our cowardly foes have swarmed upon our peaceful commune, (There is something different about this calendar...) challenging our vary existence in this bloody domain!

First it was a goblin ambush attacking a woodgathering party, then as the gatherers ran an ambush of mountain men attacked from the opposite direction. Pinned our poor gatherers tried to flee out into the open, only to be faced with a third and fourth goblin ambushes!

These terrible events coincided with a sudden reanimation of the dead in the waste. Splint said something about there being invisible necromancers in the west, but that's just crazy talk.

To battle my dear journal, I've wasted all the time I can on drinks, food, and gathering my equipment, and so with any luck the battle will be over by the time I arrive.

Dwarf Date 203.3-24 For four days this battle has gone on. Four days. Does anyone have any idea how many words I missed learning in four days?! Wretched goblins have no sense of decency, disembodied arms even less so.



Nine dwarves did us the disservice of dying in battle, leaving us to pick up the bits of their corpses and haul them into boxes for them. I've posthumously cited all of them for a lack team spirit. Of course I can only remember the names of four of them**, -Chopsabu, Zuglarr, Juunya, and Nottar- so I suppose the other six are going to get off light in the afterlife.

Ah well, such is life, or death rather. I'm still feeling alright, but I've banned the export of catapult parts so we can build up our siege base. The others look at me like I'm crazy for doing it since we don't produce catapult parts, but it is better safe than sorry.



Dwarf Date 203.4-4 The last of the animated limbs has been put back to rest, but though we searched high and low there was no sight of the necromancers. The fools must have heard that I approached and fled in terror!

*Seriously, my Dog's name is Catten.

**The other five were undorfed.

BOMBZERO:

Journal of Bombzero, Miner/Butcher extraordinaire, Date Unknown.

Heard whispers about some crazy person raising dead things outside... he better not take my corpses, the little crawlies would be unhappy, unhappy, unhappy, cant have that, no, no we cant...

if i see this man who calls himself a necromancer, I'll, I'll MURDER HIM IN THE FACE, NOBODY TOUCHES MY CORPSES!!!

MR FROG:

Journal of Mr Frog

Entry #3012

I've finally been able to relax ever since I handed off leadership of this cesspit to Draigneane. He certainly seems far more enthusiastic about his role than I ever was. Perhaps he'll be able to shape things up around here.

[...]

Entry #3018

Draigneane's performance in fighting the goblins was... interesting, to say the least. I suppose a bit of eccentricity never hurt anyone.

I must find a way to send the recording I took of his fighting back home; it'll go viral for sure.

[...]

Entry #3022

Un-*fucking*-believable. Today Draigneane interrupted me in the middle of my dinner and started harrassing me about shoddy construction on the bridge -- the cretin appears to be of the opinion that my mechanisms were somehow responsible for the bridge breaking, as though my highly-refined technological knowledge could be so unreliable as to cause a disaster on that level. I told the little moron in no uncertain terms that the total structural failure of the bridge and installed mechanisms was more likely a direct result of him stomping around on it like a fucking maniac while screaming obscenities. Then I punched the fucker in the face. While I am far from proud of such a vulgar display of rage, it did feel nice to properly express my contempt for this festering hole in the ground and the little cavemen running it. One would think that the nitwit would have retaliated, but he instead *thanked me* and walked away, which frankly disturbs me more.

I sadly appear to have been very much erroneous in my estimate of Draignean's capabilities. The diminutive little head case is clearly a walking cornucopia of mental problems. One of these days I'd like to take a crack at him with a psychology textbook, then maybe psychoanalyze him.

I need a drink.

(Splint): And then the horror hits: This was just spring.
We are SOooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo fucked.

THE MASTER:

The Master's Log:

Once my term as overseer begins, my first decree will be to unleash magnificent **CARNAGE!** upon the *wonderful* spawn! The Spawn are so great at creating **CARNAGE!** that my second decree will be construct a temple in honor of their **CARNAGE!** After this, I shall feed F.R.O.G. to the gods of **CARNAGE!** as an offering!

Note to self: Kill Splint, he is trying to prevent further **CARNAGE!** from happening. [[Talvieno's note: This refers to how Splint was constantly trying to keep the fortress from going under early.]]

THE MASTER:

Side note:

CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!

MR FROG:

Entry #3034

The Master appears to have taken to the habit of running haphazardly through the halls while vigorously rubbing that wooden pike of his and screaming, at the top of his voice, oaths to carnage, which he has apparently adopted as his core principle in life. This is good; his enthusiasm to fulfill the intended outcome of his job will serve as a great inspiration to the rest of our military.

I am greatly curious about the significance of the aforementioned wooden pike. To date, I do not believe I have ever seen him without it. I recall reading a deeply-fascinating study somewhere (by a Dr. Gladys or some such, I think? It's been a while) stating that people in difficult situations (such as, for example, living in a mug-choked warren full of mushroom-gnawing fools) may develop emotional bonds with inanimate objects to satisfy their thirst for emotional release and personal companionship. This may be an opportunity for me to confirm Dr. Gladys's results firsthand.

SPLINT:

27th Slate, 204. Interim entry.

Finally done killing the emu for food. How this had slipped by me I have no idea. Such a shame we had to sacrifice those emu for the fortress... Perhaps we need to get egg production up and see if anyone else is a decent enough chef to cook the damned things.

I've also begun to grow leery of The Master..... Last night I caught him staring at me with a touch of murderous intent. Maybe it was because I called him an elf at dinner for loving that stupid wooden pole last week.... Regardless, both he and Draigneane have.... changed since they came here. Maybe they got into Frog's stash? But, who knows. I think The Master needs to be placed in a furnished quarantine cell off the battlefield for our own safety, and Draigneane need to wise up to everyone punching him in the face. Neither will likely happen, but I can dream.

[Please don't kill me Master, I'd prefer NOT having to get redorf'd, plus I actually do the bookkeeping. Barring Spawn or barbarians killing me that is.]

[[Talviano's note: No, we don't know what happened to The Master around this point.]]

THE MASTER:

ThE MaStER's LoG:

The voices...THE VOICES SCREAM AT ME AT NIGHT! THEY TELL ME STORIES of gREat **CARNAGE!** and happy little butterflies! The GREAT gOD SIROCCO WILL SHOWER MAGNIFICENT gaZEbOs UPON THE **CARNAGE!** FILLED LANDSCAPE! ALL WILL WORSHIP THE GODS OF **CARNAGE! CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!**

(Draigneane): @The Master: Remind me to put your squad at the vanguard of every offensive we undertake.

Of course I'm also in your squad, so that could be bad.

(Splint): Nonsense! The Master's martial prowess makes him deserving of fighting as a one dwarf army! He *is* The Master after all.

And his Dwarf's deteriorating mental state has me worried. And whoever gets the opportunity needs to pitch that toothpick into a magma furnace.

(The Master): Kay. Remember what I said about me sparing you? Forget I said that. You're on the top of the list. F.R.O.G. will die second.

(Mr Frog): @Splint: Indeed. When dealing with an omnicidal maniac, one's immediate act should always entail the total fiery destruction of the lone, tattered thread holding them back from the edge.

Also, seconding the one-dwarf-army proposal.

(Splint): He's going to deliberately get me killed. I know it. And that stupid stick is corrupting his miiiind!

TALVIENO:

Journal of Talvi Diamondknight, late spring of 203

Things 'ave been weird here, since mr Draigneane took over and such. He made hisself Mayor, first off - Mr Frog (bless him) had been nice enough t' let me stay on as the leader of Spearbreakers (cuz of that, I think he fancies me!!!), but mean ol' mr Draigneane kicked me off th' team and threw me back in the shadows. ' Least I have more time t' play with me covies, and guess what! Mayor Draigneane (we have to call 'im that now, he sez so) gave me the title of "Cavy of Trades" or sumthin', but that doesn't matter - I have "Cavy" in m' name, and it's all thanks to him!!! ...But then he knocked that spawn off the ledge - Mr Frog was too kind-hearted to do that. Poor spawn... he jus' wanted his mommy, he'd been crying for her for days. I can unnerstan' it - "Oh, holistic, hel' me!" the little guy kept sayin'. I know if I was a big tough spawn, I'd have to be *awful* scared t' try to call for *my* mommy. Soon as we let him down he ran away crying... I felt so bad, I jus' wanted to giv' him a hug. I would've, too, if Draigneane had let the gate down. But then he did, and HARD got killed. I never liked HARD much anyway - he was too mean to the spawnses, and his

name in all cap'tal letter makes it ever so hard to write.

Mayor Draigneane seems to be a good goblin-killer dwarf person - 'e killed a bunch of 'em with his eyes closed and his hand stuck behind 'is back, in his shirt, and his pike stuck there, too!

Bombzero's been all a huff, cuz Draigneane wouldn't let her butcher her corpses. It ain't all his fault - Mayor Draigneane, I meant to say!!! Oh, me gods, I hope he didn't notice... Anyhow, Splint weren't too happy that he had t' do it instead. He really liked those emus for some reason... Well, The Master has a wooden stick, and Splint has emus... each to his own, I guess. 'Least they're all happy at the dinner table with their mugs. Speakin' of Bombzero, tho' - turned out she'd been carving out chunks of her bedroom wall in her spare time and making 'em into more mugs. I really think she shoulda been the boss person, she would've made a good one.

Mr Frog's been having nightmares about ballistae for some reason... I dunno why, somethin' about them not bein' sharp enough. I know he has, cuz I watch him sometimes... at night... ev'ry night... a lot ev'ry night... Anyhow, I's been wakin' him up by throwin' rocks at his head. I figger a li'l bump'll hurt a lot less worse than bad dreams.

I's taken to hidin' Joseph under my bed... He doesn't like to stay there, but there ain't much I can do 'bout that. I jus' tell him sorry, an' that there ain't no way around it. I got Mr Frog to come into my room jes a few days ago, but right then stupid Joseph tried to climb out from unner the bed! Mr Frog didn't act like he saw him, but I'm sure he was jus' bein' polite. It's so bad, too, I was goin' to seduct him, or whatever. (I stole one of Draigneane's calendars he got off th' elves - how do you like that word, journal? Seduct... don't know if I ever e'en used that word before.)

A new dwarf called Solpyre showed up with the migrants... He seemed awful scared of the boogiemens out there, but he's all right, all in all, I think. He even showed me how to make better cavy engravings! I have picshurs of 'em all over my walls, floor and ceiling now.

Finally, a lot of m' old friends died yesterday in an *awful* battle... All cuz Draigneane wouldn't let the Goblins have a bit o' earth to live on. Juunya died too, that poor old girl... She was a legendary craftsdwarf, too, she was. I liked her a lot... <here a teardrop stains the page> I named her... I named her after my stuffed cavy from when I was a li'l girl! I had that stuffed cavy since I was 2... I was so sad... Anyhow, that's why I stole one of Draigneane's calendars. I figger he didn't need it so much 's I did in my grief.

Also, The Master's scarin' me... I think I'd rather cuddle up with a spawn than have him around while I sleep at night...

In case it isn't obvious yet, Talvi is completely nuts. The ordeal with the spawn during her time as overseer left her almost childlike. 🤪

THE MASTER: *THE MASTER'S LOG:*

THE MAGNIFICENT GOD OF **CARNAGE!** WILL STRIKE DOWN ALL WHO STAND IN HIS WAY AND REDUCE THEM TO GLORIOUS **CARNAGE!** I GAVE TALVI A GIFT TODAY IN HONOR OF THE **CARNAGE!** THAT OCCURRED RECENTLY! THE GIFT WAS AN ADAMANTINE STATUE THAT I MADE OF **CARNAGE!** OUT OF TALVI'S JEWELRY! HER EYES WENT BLACK WHEN I GAVE IT TO HER AND SHE BEGAN MUTTERING PRAISES TO **CARNAGE!** I THINK SHE LIKES ME! **CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!CARNAGE!**

(Draigneon): We're into autumn now, WE SURVIVED! (Granted we survived because Godzilla and Mothra arrived at the same time and decided to fight each other, not because of our military prowess)

[[Talviero's note: this was immediately derailed into magma landmines and efficient Spawn capture systems.]]

MITCHEWAWA: *Journal of Mitch, 204*

I've been struck with a fey mood! Not a real one of course, but I do have schematics in my head for catching a web-spitting demon, and a plan to use it; using a traditional Giant Cave Spider silk farm, force the demon to shoot its horrific webbing at a stray cavy or some other animal. We'll collect the web, and create a set of magma-proof clothing. Hopefully, we'll have a known vampire by then, locked away somewhere. I'll tell future overseers to keep an eye out for one, and lock it away to train for years.

We must then create a drop pit at the front of our base, deep enough for nothing to escape but shallow enough to injure nothing. Arm the vampire as best as we can, and put him in there. A normal dwarf would drown from the lack of oxygen, but the magma-immune vampire will thrive, darting between the burning Spawn dropped down and killing them all with its supernatural ability.

This is, of course, just a theory. An interesting punishment for a filthy vampire, and a perhaps effective method of defence, but we don't know how the Spawn act in magma just yet...

DRAIGNEAN:

Dwarf Date 203.04-7 We've almost completed the renovations to the magma forges! By digging out a large cavern directly beneath the main forges and cracking one of the walls, we should be able to fill the entire lower section with magma!

The foolish miners have expressed some dubiousness over who is going to be the one who takes away the final piece of stone that holds back the ocean of liquid hot magma, but honestly diary, how dangerous could it be?



Dwarf Date 203.04-10 Work complete on the underforge magmaworks, everything went resplendently (I swear I'm missing a few of the elvish calendars I bought...), and none of the foolish worry wort miners were injured.

Granted they had to dig a stairway out *while* the magma was rushing in, but that was due to poor planning on their part.

Dwarf Date 203.04-14 One pair of adamantine boots has been completed in secret. They are the princes of footwear these boots, water resistant, oil resistant, salt-mist resistant, heat resistant, fang resistant, and apparently foot resistant- I've tried to bring myself to wear them half a dozen times, but to no avail.

The entire situation just makes me want to take my frustration out on one of the fools running this place, but I can't FIND any of them. Must be hiding...

'Draigneau' Kisezi has been unhappy lately. He was enraged by long patrol duty lately. He was unable to find somebody in charge

Dwarf Date 203.04-17 Another successful mandate dear diary, the ban on the sale of catapult parts has yielded a 1000% percent decrease in the number of catapult parts sold over the last three years, or so Mr Frog tells me.

Draigneau' Kisezi. Nordendorf-Hausler's mandate has ended.

Good fellow that one, a bit much for the touchy-feely-punchy gestures of loyalty and devotion, but a good fellow.

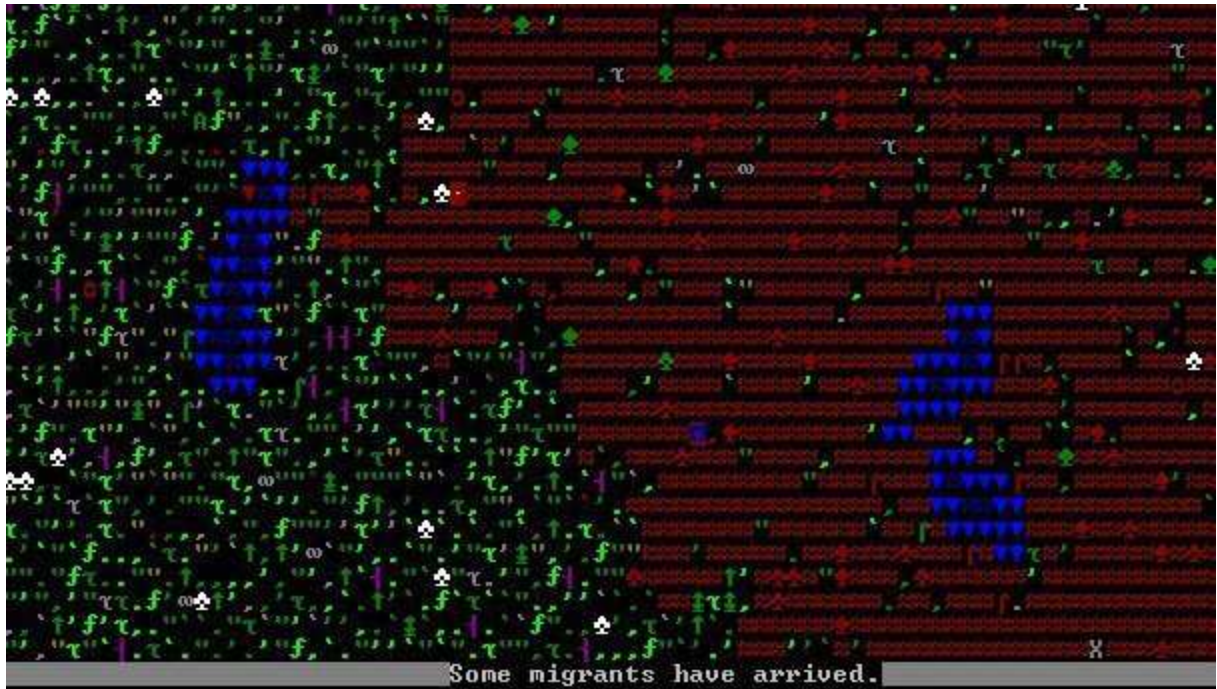
Dwarf Date 203.04-20 HARD's spirit has apparently risen from the grave, standing eternal sentinel over our entrance and refusing to be moved by any means. Some of our former overseers seem to think that this is an ill omen, but I really don't think the dead rising from their graves is anything portentous. (When I find the person who's ripping pages out of my calendars I'm going to... defenestrate them!)

All he does is stand around and moan about how "Wynz is coming" and how doom awaited the blood of his blood if they followed his path. Personally I think a spirit that constantly tells us that we're going to have wins in the future is an excellent feature to add to my mighty fortress, after all, what are the chances of HARD's direct bloodkin immigrating here?

Dwarf Date 203.05-1 The extra forges that I commanded into existence in the magmaworks are running full steam to produce worked gold for my personal chambers and to work the adamantine.

Splint seems to be spending a great deal of his time muttering about the adamantine, clearly he's concerned that we don't have enough. I'll have to look into this.

Dwarf Date 203.05-5 Ah, fresh faces to carve onto the waiting tombstones! Migrants have arrived, seven of them to be precise, and a dwarf named Wynz came with them. He seemed quite stricken to see the spirit of HARD floating about the entrance and moaning (by coincidence I'm sure) what sounded an awful lot like his name.



I wonder if I should tell him about the spirit's warning about how doom would surely befall the "blood of his blood"?

Nah, too much effort.

Dwarf Date 203.05-15 To relieve the number of dwarves that have decided to use my set of personal rooms as a bunkhouse I've ordered a dwarf who will only refer to himself as "Loud Whispers" to do something about it.

Honestly I would have just told them there was free candy in the magmaworks, but he seems to have decided to draft up plans for an entirely new set of personal rooms. I have, like the godlike individual that I am, compassionately approved these plans, as long as they don't interfere with the dwarves hauling that solid gold chair and table set up to my rooms.



Dwarf Date 203.05-17 Splint's incoherent worrying noises over the adamantine have finally won me over, and so for the good of all dwarves I have ordered the spire dug out another thirty feet down.

Splint nearly fainted with excitement when I told him.

Dwarf Date 203.05-25 We've mined out every chunk of adamantine that Splint has begged me to mine, bringing us up to roughly 200 chunks of adamantine! Splint's gratitude rendered him insensate. (I KNEW IT! There are Cavy prints on this page! A cavy has been stealing my calendars!)



I like the dwarf, I really do, but he's just too sensitive. The man was so grateful when I told him that he was going to be working adamantine himself to deal with the surplus that he actually started to visibly shake, and when I told him that there was another adamantine spire that we could mine out he actually started crying a little.

Dwarf Date 203.05-27 I awoke from a fell dream this morning, in it I dreamt that I was being eaten by ten-thousand thousand tiny chocolate lobsters, and as they devoured they whispered the name Zospu Genedaksum- their great and terrible eyeless lobster master, whose entire exoskeleton is made of waxy chocolate.

Remind to never sample Mr Frog's 'special brew' ever again.



Dwarf Date 203.06-9 My personal rooms have been completed! I have two solid gold statues, two solid gold thrones, one solid gold weapon rack, one solid gold cabinet, one solid gold chest, one nether cap chest (for keeping my drinks cold), and common wood bed to show how in touch I am with the everyday dwarf.


Owned Objects: 17

Holdings: Throne Room
Grand Bedroom
Great Dining Room
2 Chests
1 Cabinet
1 Weapon Rack
1 Armor Stand

Needs: Decent Office
Needs: Decent Quarters
Needs: Decent Dining Room
Needs: 2 Chests
Needs: 1 Cabinet
Needs: 1 Weapon Rack
Needs: 1 Armor Stand

To show how generous I am, I have mandated that each dwarf also receive 1 chest and a cabinet of his own, to be shipped to his room with all haste. I admit this is not entirely altruistic, for I plan to use it in a clever sting operation to catch the devil-cavy who steals my calendars at night!

Dwarf Date 203.06-12 The Master, who I never thought would leave his wooden "poley woley" has upgraded, discarding the wooden pole for one of bismuth bronze. He has since become just as attached to this one and as such has retreated to his room, taking the spear and a few jugs of rock-nut oil (for polishing purposes he says) with him.



→ 'The Master' Fikodnam Mangròdthedak Dôbar, Murderdorf/FarmHauler has
→ grown attached to a bismuth bronze pike?
Cog Dorenenseb, Ghostly Axedwarf has been put to rest.

He hasn't left for two days.

Dwarf Date 203.06-16 A human caravan has signaled its approach! Ah, the mighty caravans of the humans, so amusing to watch as they attempt to navigate the hills and trees with their clumsy wagons. More so when they accidentally run over a couple things that look rather unsettlingly like the spawn of legend.

The spawn-like critters have started swarming everywhere outside, and almost everyone is in a panic over it. I don't see why, all of them were banished a million-billion years ago, it's not like any of us have seen any of them.

Regardless, our own Mr Frog has assaulted the lever that closes the bridge to the outside, screaming for everyone to get into the emergency burrows. Talvieno (Who, most conspicuously, owns a cavy) has agreed to take everyone into her personal rooms.*

I, however, have ordered our military to assemble behind the gate. We shall mount an attack as soon as we're able, we must protect the people living inside of a giant cavy at all cost.

Dwarf Date 203.06-18 My Beardsense has informed me that a great force of naughtiness has entered our domain, that and the overpowering reek of rotting flesh combined with funereal moans anyway.



Apparently a number of necromancers have earmarked this area for whatever necromancers do with random spits of land that they happen to tromp over. Mr Frog, after consulting an unusually flat piece of glowy stone, tells me that as of this moment there are forty-two zombies, two necromancers (one of which is a barbarian from the mountains), and a host of twelve spawn like creatures.



In light of his rock calculations I've dissolved the force that has been massing behind our gates, we shall wait for the correct tactical moment to begin our advance. Specifically a moment when there are far fewer things wanting to kill us, we aren't outnumbered five-to-one, and when I'm busy doing something else important and can't participate in the raid.

Dwarf Date 203.06-20 The spawn-like creatures and the necromancers are fighting each other. I wouldn't have believed it except for the fact that I watched it myself from the clever little observation tower. The spawn like things advance,

jump on the zombies, and then proceed to claw and bite them into tiny, tiny pieces.



Obviously these spawn-like creatures are a powerful force of good, I voted to open the gates to let these more friendly spawn in, –the matter with the humans was obviously a misunderstanding- but I only received one other vote before I was overruled.

Bigoted pansies.

Dwarf Date 203.07-3 The last of the undead has been vanquished, its final terrified moans cutting out rather abruptly as a spawn clawed its head off. The necromancers have long since been chased off of our territory, fleeing these paragik (I had to invent the last half of that word as the other was CHEWED OUT OF MY CALENDAR. The Cavy Must Pay.) like spawn-things.

The spawn-things are still outside though, and I still can't muster enough support to get the bridge to the surface open. At the very least I've ordered everyone to get out of Talvi's room, the constant forty dwarf party is making me jealous.

*Seriously. The entire Alert2 burrow was Talvi's room. What.

MR FROG:

Journal of Mr Frog

Entry #3040

Made a sarcastic comment to Draigneane regarding his ridiculous ban on catapult part exports. Bit stupid in retrospect, considering that, quite literally, a fist to the face is too subtle a medium for the slurry-brained fool to grasp its finer meaning.

On a nicer side, I was confused by the seemingly-extremely-nonspecific use of the term 'catapult parts', so I consulted a self-proclaimed expert on the subject. After a long string of miscommunications (blast these dwarves and their limited perspectives), I managed to piece together that all catapult parts are designed to be completely-interchangeable, such that any three parts may be used to build a functioning catapult. She walked me through the theory, and I freely admit that it is extremely clever. Again, I must confess that I may be being a bit harsh in my opinion of these dwarves.

[...]

Entry #3046

Today, as I was attempting to develop a refined version of the prototype I mentioned in Entry #3008 (purely for entertainment, of course; the particular compound I was attempting to brew is already being mass-produced through artificial means back home), that moron Draigneane stumbled into my room (no idea why) and, after seeing that I was concocting a liquid substance of some sort, demanded that I allow him to sample some of the "special brew" (he didn't even say 'please!'). I've never been one to turn down a voluntary test subject, so I granted his request.

As was mentioned in the previous entry, Draigneane had begun displaying limited clairvoyance after I had began to slip small amounts of the prototype compound into his drink; his behaviour in the experiment precisely matched the prediction I had made based on that fact.

After receiving a full dose, Draigneane immediately lost consciousness and collapsed. A superficial examination revealed that his heart rate had slowed to a crawl and that his entire cerebrum save for small sections of the temporal and occipital lobes had ceased all activity.

After regaining consciousness around 12 hours later, Draigneane gave an account consistent with a state of total psychocorporeal dissociation; he reported perceiving what was most likely the usual initial dream-like period of confused sensory interpretation, after which he gave a detailed visual description of a Forgotten Beast which had apparently recently wandered into the caverns. After carefully checking the limited feeds from the cavern layers (I hadn't been able to get a decent surveillance network installed in the short time that they were open), I can confirm that his description was 100% accurate.

There *is* still one last crucial test to determine whether the brew is working as intended, but I lack the tools necessary to safely take measurements confirming whether it had worked, and in any case I suspect that Draigneane suddenly 'vanishing' would cause unwanted suspicion regardless of how well I hid the body. And I suppose it wouldn't really be fair to Draigneane even if it did work. Still, these results are very promising.

[...]

Entry #3056

Draigneau walked in on me in my bedroom today while I was surveying the attacking hordes on my PEA (I am reminded of a certain incident from my adolescence which I will not explore in detail here). That thrice-blasted son of a hoople-headed hippopotamus must think we're best buddies or something, because he's taken to dropping in and interrupting me whenever the mood strikes him or something. He didn't really understand what he saw, though, although he's now pestering me for one of his own (it seems that the similarities to the aforementioned incident run very deep indeed). I'll happily make three for every dwarf in the damn fortress if it'll get him out of my hair. The continued temporal integrity of this iteration can't be worth *that* much.

SPLINT:

5th Malachite, 204. Interim entry.

I'm going to die of heart failure I just know it. That arrogant... *MOTHERFUCKER*, There really is no suitable substitute, could have killed us all by mining out the Adamantine spire! Was he never told the old tales of Everoc as a child!? That stone breeds madness, it may well have been a catalyst in the birth of **THEM!** And worse yet, he's assigned ME of all people to extract the strands! While this is indeed an honor, I am still fearful for my very soul.

I fear the presence of this stone is what is fueling The Master's own psychosis. i fear it's calling him to dig deeper... I have left a note to the next overseer, the fortress' longtime miner Sus to cordon off the spires. I care not what we do with the thankfully safe extracted ore, and I even find myself wanting a fine cloak made from the stuff, in spite of my near pathologic fear of it (When I was assigned strand extraction duty I was on the brink of strangling Draigneau to death, but thankfully reason trumped my fear.) But Further extraction is too risky; Anything could lie within a spire... Even the she-beast herself.

I find it difficult to juggle my bookkeeping duties with extraction, so I may need to hand my office over to someone else if we need the metal badly enough. I am also finding I may no longer be able to trust Draigneau or The Master, as madness has positively gripped them. This place has.... changed them. Between Draigneau becoming uncharacteristically oblivious to all around him seeking beat him to a pulp and blundering his way into a victory over a small goblin raid, and The Master adopting weapons as if they're pets, they've clearly gone off the deep end. Talvieno has become a near child-like wreck of a dwarf, and I'm positive she either suffers from a different sort of insanity or has become enamored with that Mr Frog fellow. Speaking of Mr Frog, I've run some plans by him on a new woodcutting implement, using mechanisms and their perpetual motion properties to move split serrated disks to saw down trees quicker than a normal axe ever could. He took the plans and said something about making some improvements to it, and I have not seen him outside of mealtimes or the odd passing in the halls since.

I pray to the gods we can gather the strength to fight the coming tide of darkness...

-following is barely intelligible chickenscratch writing, appearing to read *"All will fall before the horde"*-

(Splint): Draigneon, you will be the near-death of us all. I just know it.

(Draigneon): I actually like to think that I've been fairly successful in my term. I've guided us through numerous military conflicts, expanded our population base, expanded our industry, saved us from starvation (we now have over 150 edible plant tucked away, compared to 0 in mid spring), removed the job canceling spawn, mined enough adamantine for a refit of the military, expanded the living quarters, increased the average Dwarven living conditions, set to rest most of the moaning spirits, and have generally managed that without making anyone terribly unhappy. Never underestimate a resourceful idiot.

(Splint): When I said near death I meant if you keep mining those damn spires.

(Draigneon): Not with that attitude we won't!
Same dig-speed ahead!

(Splint): I think I may have just accidentally killed us all.

(Draigneon): Well, at least we won't have to mourn each other.

TERRAHEX:

Diary of Terrahex Part 2

Dear Diary,

Today my world has collapsed. I don't know if I can live anymore. I don't know how I survived being this lonely without her. Nobody ever talked to me except for her. Spawny was telling me about how much better dwarf flesh tastes than two-hump camel brains when the wall collapsed next to her and someone yelled "surprise!"

When the dust from the wall settled, the military was revealed. I yelled for Spawny to run, but blood lust probably got to her. She's been up there without her primary meal for an entire year, it's not her fault! I tried to yell for the military to leave her alone, but I couldn't. I knew that they must have the tunnel entrance near by, so I ran back in. sure enough, there was a freshly dug tunnel heading through the dirt and I could faintly hear Spawny's howling and the grunting and yelling of dwarves fighting. I ran as fast as I could through the dark tunnel, coming to the opening.

The Military had cornered her, slowly edging her closer and closer to the end of the ledge. I would have shouted to her if so many people hadn't been there, but my breath had frozen in my lungs. I rushed toward her, but a root that was concealed by

the dark grabbed my leg and caused me to trip, nearly biting my lip off in the process. Then I heard the yelp of Spawny as she was pushed off and the cheering of the dwarves that had killed her.

I couldn't save her. I saw the newest overseer, Draigneane, and rage filled me. He's in the military, and no doubt was the one behind the attack. I wanted to punch him in the face with all the force in my dwarven body. Fortunately, it was done for me by _____. And everyone else, too. I don't want to be mean, but he deserved it.

Then goblins appeared, detected by F.R.O.G. and the military decided to recharge before taking them on.

But Draigneane didn't. He took them on all by himself and scared them off. I'm so confused. I want to kill him and forgive him. I don't know whether he's good or bad or anything. I just want my friend back.

Diary,

Today I helped The Master drink away a barrel of whiskey. Well he drank most of it. I just kind of filled my cup now and then when my booze stopped being bubbly. The Master had his wooden pike with him like he always did, and from time to time he would whisper to it and pour some beer over it while saying, "Yeah, you like that don't you?"

The Master is a weird dwarf I suppose, but he's caring towards his pike. That counts for something right? I secretly suspect that he's the one who went for Spawny first, but can I really blame him? Spawny was the bad guy to him.

I haven't been feeling like finding your owner lately, Diary. You're the only friend I have left now, but I know that you're not my friend. You should be returned, but I just can't do it now. I hope you understand.

[a crude image of a smiley face is drawn on the page. It looks like it was done half-heartedly.]

Hey Diary,

Lately Bombzero has been stalking all the random covies that have started getting out of control. Talvi hasn't been taking very good care of them since she started drinking out of Mr Frog's cup when he wasn't looking. I think Bombzero is hoping one of those weird bunny creatures will just drop dead, so he can process the corpse. I've seen how Bombzero cuts things up, singing light hearted songs while cutting through the flesh of whatever animal happened to die too close to our fortress. He even tried to get to Spawny's body, but it was at the bottom of the moat and we're not allowed to go there. Honestly, though, I'm not sure whether Bombzero or The Master is more scary.

Speaking (or writing) of The Master, he's apparently discarded his wooden pike for a new, bronze one and has quickly grown to love that one as well. I'm happy that he made a new friend, but I felt kind of bad for his old one. I started looking for it, but I couldn't find it anywhere. I wish I could ask him where he put it, but he's been holed up in his room for a few days and won't leave.

TERRAHEX:

Diary of Terrahex Part 3

How are you today diary?

I guess I'm all right. It still hurts inside of me a little, but I can manage. Bombzero

has been cutting things up in the butcher shop today, and that makes me nervous. Nothing to my knowledge has died recently. I was so nervous that I snuck into the shop while he was hacking off limbs and singing Don't Stop Butcherin' accompanied by a six string stone guitar and a piano made of bones. I couldn't locate the source of the instrumental part of the song, nor could I tell what the corpse was without any skin. I didn't stay very long because he started gnawing on the femur of the creature, and he hadn't cut it off yet.

I couldn't sate my sense of dread, however. I need to know whether it was Spawny he was cutting up. After I ate some lunch I headed back to the cliff where Spawny had spent a year of her life. The bones of the merchant were still there, scattered about over the ledge, each with bite marks going up and down its surface.

I carefully looked over the edge into the moat, but I couldn't see anything. It was too bright out. I'm not satisfied. I can't go out at night either, it's too dangerous. I might fall. Going out and checking the moat personally is also out of the question.

I need to know.

I need to ask Bombzero.

Hey Diary,

I don't think I can do it. He's just so scary. No matter how much I practice, my tongue turns to stone in my mouth at the sight of him. I can only picture him gnawing on that bone. Will he gnaw on my leg? Would he make a good friend?

Dear Diary,

Today I realized that I didn't really need to ask Bombzero anything at all. I only needed to look at Splint's notes. Splint counts every resource we have in Spearbreakers. If there's no Spawn meat on his list then Bombzero left Spawny alone.

I snuck into his office (I've been doing a lot of sneaking lately) and looked all over. There were stacks of paper in all the corners of the room, mixed in with the huge stacks of mugs that roamed the fort, but I quickly surmised that they were old records, some dating as early as 202.

I searched his desk and found many interesting things, but he was counting up the current number of socks that we had in the fortress and I didn't want to make him lose count by rummaging around.

I finally found it on the page that was under the one he was calculating sock quantity on. It was hard to get at, but I kept edging the paper out from under the other one every time he picked up his nonspecific writing utensil.

Bombzero had butchered that dead goblin.

It's so awesome to not be suspicious of my meal anymore, Diary!

(Talvieno): Draigneon, just noticed this.



You're mining out the center of an adamantine spire?!?!?

(Draigneane): Yes? I've been mining out the center of those spires for some time. I stopped once I thought I'd push my luck far enough, then splint demanded that we DIG DEEPER.

Mining has been started on the second adamantine spire, and I've recently discovered a THIRD adamantine spire.

(Talvieno): Put me with Splint about being very worried about the adamantine... I never mine the center, just because of the huge chance that the tube extends to the top.

(Splint): If you found a 3rd one STAY THE FUCK AWAY from it.

(Draigneane): Why?

(Splint): Think. We can afford to lose Rodge, Sus, or Bombzero. That third spire is probably where the circus is waiting to say hello, and if that's the case whichever one of them was there will have to wall the breach, (and due to dwarven idiocy) kill themselves in the process.

I say this because training up replacements would be nightmarishly difficult, and you're pushing your luck as it stands.

.... You're going to anyway. Aren't you.

(Draigneane): Of course! If we hit that adamantine bull's-eye, the rest of the dominoes should fall like a house of cards. Checkmate. Now, like all great plans, my strategy is so simple an idiot could have devised it. On my command all dwarves will line up and fall directly into hell, clogging it with corpses.

[[Talvieno's note: Most of us were biting our nails at this point.]]

TALVIENO:

From the journal of Talvi Diamondknight 7th of Hematite, 203

Mayor Draigneane sure is a right nice dwarf - he's awful good to Splint, and he even came up with a new salute - we punch 'im in the face! It's good fun, and its helpin' ever'body keep the stress down. He seems to like it, calls it comradery or somethin'. If there's anything I could say bad about 'im, it's that he doesn't think about mugs at all. How could anyone in his right mind not think about mugs, I wonder? Anyhow...

I was watchin' my lil' covies the other day, an' one of 'em found Draigneane's calendar. I stopped readin' the words in it - most of 'em were too long for me to read, and I couldn't use 'em right none anyhow. That's what Mr Frog tole me. He wasn't too nice about it, but I think he just had a bad day, y' know? I offered to give him a massage and all, but he said no. I was sad. Oh, goodness me, I forgot what I was thinkin'! Okay, so, Georgette and Petunia, two of my covies - they found Draigneane's calendar, and they were nibblin' the edges. So I thoughts to myself, I thought... "Well, Talvi... It must be good if they eat it. Covies are right smart, they is." So I took a nibble too, and by gods, it's a sight better'n the stuff they serve up at the dining hall!

9th of Hematite, 203

I was hungry, an' there weren't much to eat down at the dining hall - not much good for eatin', anyhow. I got a lil cravin' for some paper. See, I knew paper was good 'cause of Draigneane's calendar that I ate yesterday. (I almost didn't eat one page - velutinous. It reminded me of my covies... but I wanted to know what it tasted like still, so I hugged it a lil bit afore I ate it to make it right.) I knew Draigneane had some calendars - a whole cabinet of 'em - down yonder in his room. So I went to get some.

His room's a bit plain, sofar as statues and such goes. The way he carries on 'bout himself and all, you'd've thought it'd be prettier inside. I nibbled one of the curtains on his bed, but it tasted bad, so I didn't eat no more of it. 'stead, I went to his cab'net and got out an armful of his lil calendars. I almost got caught on th' way back to my cavy room, though - The Master was walkin' up and down the hallways, rubbin' his pole with rock nut oil. Ever'body tells him to do that in his room, but he don't ever listen.

12th of Hematite, 203

I was rearragin' the books in Splint's office (big books go on the bottom shelf) and fixing them (all the q's, p's, d's and b's need their circles filled), when I noticed a name on his census sheet I hadn't seen before - Terrahex. I didn't know who it was, but I do know there's nobody like that here, so I erased the name. I wonder who wrote it... Doesn't matter none, though.

19th of Hematite, 203

I was hungry again. Joseph laughs and says I'm always hungry, but I told him I

thought he was rude and shoved him back under th' bed. He wanted me to take him to see the security systems for some reason - he called it the FROG... I tole him only frog I knew of was the *Mister* Frog. He groaned and tole me to go shove some calendar pages somewheres... think I might try that later. But I'll tell you what - I wanted those calendars. Sadly, tho - Draigneane knew there were some missin'. I had to be more careful this time. Oh, if only Mr Frog had calendars... I'm in his room ev'ry night, it's be *awful* easy to get some if he had 'em.

I went into Draigneane's room again and took some pages out of 'is calendars. I'm sure he won't miss 'em. I got the bad ones too - I made sure I got only the ones with words I didn't know how to use. I was bein' nice to 'im - affer all, what good's a word calendar if you don't know the words? Anyhow, when I's done, I had an awful good number of pages, and I took 'em all back to my room.

I wonder if I could make calendar beer...

19th of Malachite, 203

Oh, gods... I think I ate too many pages yesterday - that'r the pages had somethin' on 'em that isn't good for little covies like me to eat. The pages were gross - made me sick an' all that. I didn't like them none good at all. I think from now on I'm gonna bring some other covies with me - they's gots better noses than I've got. They'll know if the paper is bad.

I thought of a great idea - I'd take a little bite out of each page to see if they were bad. If I found a bad calendar, I wouldn't eat no more of it. If I found a good one, I'd take some pages. Good for me Draigneane's not in his room much. It's odd, too, tho - his room is all pretty with gold (my room's better, tho', cause it's a cavy). Oh, and afore I forget - Petunia left a little something under the pillows on Draigneane's bed. Maybe I'll remember to get it later.

Several pages are missing from the journal at this point, followed by writing in a curious shaky scrawl: "Calendars are better. Oh, I'm going to be sick"

13th of Galena, 203

Draigneane's so awful nice! Makes me feel right good about eating the bad pages of his calendars. He gave us all pretty cabinets and chests! He said we ought to keep our books in such in it, but I don't have any books - only pages (and I sleep with those at night). So I'm gonna make the dressers and ever'thang into cavy nests. Covies need beds too.

19th of Galena, 203

There's people attacking outside - Mr Frog thinks he's "been found out", Draigneane thinks they're after his calendar, The Master swears up and down they're after his pole, and Bombzero jus' hauled a ton of corpses into her room an' locked the door for one reason or another. Anyhow, I let everyone into my room. I've got a big room, so it's good. I figured it might also keep anyone from findin' out about my pages, with so many people blockin' the way. Which is good, 'cause Draigneane's been checking inside the new cabinets he's given anybody. I think he wants his pages back. Poor Draigneane, if he only knew I'm keepin' him from gettin' sick. I've built up a tolerance to the poison he sprays on 'em (figured it out - Mr Frog makes it for him), so I eat those to keep him from feelin' bad from it.

Anyhow, last night I accidentally walked in on Mr Frog while he was still awake. He

seemed awful upset about it, but I lied and said I was wonderin' if he could make a good poison. He seemed awful happy to talk after that. He's so smart, I want to be just like him someday. I saw him with a little glowy tablet - I couln't stop m'self afore I said "That looks like Joseph!" He wondered what I meant but I wouldn't say no more. Jospeh said he ought to be kept a secret. I'm doin' right good keepin' it a secret, too. Only my cavies know.

5th of Limestone, 203

Well, ever'one's still in my room, and happy, too - they like my cavies, and my cavies like the company. And the socks. I have my cavies trained to steal socks now. I'm only doin' it for their good - the socks need tasted to make sure Mr Frog and Draigneane hain't sprayed no poison on 'em.

I've decided to not steal pages anymore - Draigneane's too good about searchin' rooms. From now on when I'm hungry, I'm going to eat right out of his pages. That oughta fix the problem. I'll only eat bad parts of words - parts I can't pronounce good.

I really like Draigneane bein' mayor. I hope he gets to keep his calendars afterwards. [[Talvieno's note: It wasn't until after this post that all journals were moved to the post I was keeping updated. This was originally the second post, but due to character count limits it was later moved.]]

[[Talvieno's note: A bit unnecessary, but I had to include this for teh lulz.]]

(The Master): I'm starting to think my dwarf might be going a tiny bit insane.

(Splint): Nah, he just developed an unhealthy obsession with his weapons. That's not a sign of going bonkers. Not at all.

(Sus): Hey, what red-blooded dorf doesn't enjoy stroking his wood every now and then?

(Splint): Ones that aren't *Armok-damned elves!* He better be strokin' metal or stone, not wood!

(Talvieno): Rocks are harder than wood anyway, right?

TERRAHEX

The Diary of Terrahex Part 4

It's me again!

Today Mr Frog warned Draigneane about the zombies that were coming toward Spearbreakers. Draigneane just calmly replied that the military would take care of it while flexing his arms. Mr Frog then called him insane and a few other words that I shouldn't write in you, Diary. He's not a very good friend.

Eventually, Mr Frog started bellowing that everyone get into their emergency stations, and somehow everyone ended up in Talvi's room. Now I'm writing this. I hope that Draigneane doesn't let the zombies in. Underneath Talvi's bed is horrible

smelling, and I have to share the space with an extremely fat cavy that has apparently made its home here. It would be horrible to have to stay here forever. Also, I don't want my brains eaten.

The cavalry has arrived Diary!

Fischer burst into Talvi's room today with a flustered look and told Talvi and Splint and Mr Frog to follow him. I decided to go, too, because I was getting tired of hiding, so I snuck out and followed them to the dining room.

Draigneau was already there. I suddenly realized that I probably shouldn't be here. The 4 past overseers and the captain of the guard were here. I was about to leave when Draigneau said that They had been spotted.

"Who?" asked Talvi.

"Who else?" Draigneau said. "The Spawn." I stopped in my tracks. They must have heard what we had done to Spawny.

Splint swore and Mr Frog muttered under his breath. "Are they undead?" the latter asked.

"we can't tell." Fischer said. "The spawn look horrible enough when they're not dead. from a distance we couldn't tell if they were rotting husks or not."

"We're doomed if they are." Splint mumbled.

"but I have a plan." Draigneau spouted happily, oblivious to the grim mood of the room. "what we do is sacrifice one of the more useless dwarves, and throw it out at the spawn. if they eat his brain first, they're undead."

Fischer looked mildly annoyed. "We need a plan and fast. Anything that you can come up with that has nothing in common with anything this," he gestured to Draigneau, "can come up with."

"The cavy warriors will save us!" Talvi shouted. when everyone looked at her funny, she elaborated. "The cavy warriors are supposed to protect dwarves from the spawn in the legends of old."

"Talvi..." Splint ran his fingers through his hair. Poor splint. "Even if the Cavy warriors did exist, they're probably dead now."

Draigneau suddenly lit up. "Don't we have zombies outside?"

The rest of the meeting was about cavy warriors and zombification of said warriors until The Master ran in.

"They're fighting!" He shouted.

"What are?" Fischer leaped to his feet, weapon in hand.

"The Spawn!" The Master shouted even louder. "They're fighting the undead!"

Everyone stood shocked. Draigneau was the first to respond. "Does this mean that they're the good guys?"

"You foolish..." Fischer trailed off. I did not think that he was being a very good friend.

"quickly," Splint stood up. "I must see this with my own eyes."

"I want to see the Cavy Warriors as well." Talvi said, a dreamy look in her eye.

"They rise from the grave just to save me..."

"Shut it Talvi!" Mr Frog yelled. When she looked a little hurt, Mr Frog, being the caring person he was, quickly apologized. They're such great friends, diary. I wish I had friends like that.

I didn't want to wait for the rest of the group to reach the drawbridge, so I ran ahead. I don't think I've told you this, Diary, but I'm a fast runner. It comes from hauling all these mugs everywhere. Off topic, I actually saw someone juggling mugs before I found you. I would have clapped, but I didn't want to distract him, since those were some nice mugs.

Anyway, when I found a good, nonspecific lookout spot I saw that the Spawn were indeed attacking the undead menace. Squinting in the bright light, I saw that not

only were they destroying the zombies, but they were winning!

Not long after I got out I heard a howl that sounded way too familiar, but I dare not hope...

"Hey you!"

I looked around, seeing that Draigneane and the previous overseers had arrived and the former was on top of a hastily constructed pile of mugs that menaced with spikes of incompetence. Draigneane was pointing in the direction of the spawn and undead. I looked. Nothing interesting in the battle seemed to be.

"You over there!" Draigneane continued. "What are you doing outside of the burrow?"

"I looked again at him. He seemed to be pointing less at the spawn and more at me. But I couldn't be seen obviously.

"Mr Frog, who is that dwarf?" Draigneane continued.

"How the circus am I supposed to know?" Mr Frog replied. Such a tightly knit group this is.

"What dwarf?"

"That one."

"I don't see a Dwarf."

"Over there by that rock."

"Oh, now I see him. Yeah I don't know who that is either."

"I don't see it."

"Looks like a stray cavy to me."

"Where?"

"There you idiot."

"I still don't see it."

I was getting tired of them talking like that, and I was really suspicious of them. I decided to move down and see what it was they were looking at. As soon as I started coming down however, they were sent into an uproar. I froze.

They saw me.

My palms started getting sweaty, my mind fuzzy, my stomach queasy.

"He doesn't look too good."

"I think he's gonna..."

My head started to spin and I threw up violently.

"Awe it's all over me."

"Disgusting."

I ran as fast as I could in any direction I could and eventually ended up in one of those letters that splint had carved out in the first year that designated which stockpiles were what. I felt safe here. I think I'll stay here awhile.

(Draigneane): Okay, problem, big one. Type: Bug.

The Master, as you all know, entered a strange mood. He took a single blue garnet. The first time this happened he made the artifact fine, he started work, he ended work. Since it all went without a hitch I didn't give it a further thought. On that same save I then proceeded to test another theory of anti-spawn warfare (keeping the fight entirely underground), which failed massively. I savescummed of course and went back one, even hoping that the Master would crap out something even better this time around.

He just went insane.

I've tried to get him to make the artifact without going insane (three times now), but

now every time I load up the save from my last restore point he "works furiously" and then goes insane mid-fall.

So, the spawn corrupt your fucking save files and make your Dwarves go insane through time and space.

Is there any way to handle this? [[Talvieno's note: It was later decided that Armok himself had caused the mood to fail (as it's supposed to be impossible), so that he could have The Master up there with him.]]

(Splint): I've never encountered this.... Lock him in. Looks like a relative will unfortunately have to take over if it continues. Shame too, I was enjoying his psychosis, though I can say it's justified that he finally went off his rocker.

(Draigneau): He's stark raving mad, which I suppose is a good thing since it means will be able to get to the valuable gear he was wearing faster. It does mean that we've also lost one of our best fighting dwarves.

(Mr Frog): I think this is an absolutely BRILLIANT opportunity for roleplay.

[[Talvieno's note: This time the conversation was promptly derailed into what would be the best type of trap for the entrance. A spike bridge was decided upon.]]

TERRAHEX:

Legend of Everoc as told by TerraheX

Countless lifetimes ago, there was a land named Everoc where a fortress named Syrupleaf firmly planted its roots in the glacial ice. Its denizens were dwarves, Armok's most sturdy creation. They were strong beyond compare, relentless in their alcoholism, and short enough to squeeze through the cracks of the mountain.

However, the demon Holistic Detective, once a dwarf herself, was spiteful of the species she used to be a member of. Once a denizen of the dwarven fortress Headshoots, she was corrupted by demonic influence and became a twisted monster, slaughtering her people and turning stone to ash. Accounts vary as to her appearance, but she is most often described as a skeletal dwarf with rotting flesh clinging to her bones and eyes whose irises and pupils are replaced with burning black holes.

Now, not quite a demon and not quite a dwarf, Holistic Detective raised an army of creatures whose sole purpose was to devour the creatures that Holistic herself once was. She swept them across the land and they destroyed all that happened to fall in their path, but they were stopped at Syrupleaf.

Armok by now was intrigued with the creatures the former dwarf with godlike powers created. Armok was the creator of creators, god of gods. Dwarves worshiped gods and gods worshiped Armok. When Armok grew bored of worlds, he smashed them then built anew, but never before had he seen such as Holistic Detective. The Spawn of Holistic seemed unstoppable, but were halted momentarily at Syrupleaf. Slowly Syrupleaf did crumble, and Holistic claimed victory. Life was exterminated. Armok was intrigued.

Then the half-dwarf challenged the demons, making alliances that would eventually lead to victory and doom through deceit. Armok watched her rise to the ruler of the world and her failure at the very end. Obsidian encased Everoc as a result of the battles and left Holistic's treacherous vanquisher alone on a lifeless planet for all eternity.

Armok was not satisfied with this result however, and gathered up the pieces of Holistic Detective and brought her back to life, transforming her from a skeletal embodiment of corruption to the dwarf of incomparable beauty she had once been.

Armok gave her a choice, to cease to exist as he once more reforged the world, or to create at his side as he made a new world. Armok lusted for the fresh, bloody battles that her spawn had given him and wanted more.

Holistic Detective agreed and provided spawn in worlds after, adding features that she couldn't previously with new power granted by Armok. Sometimes the dwarves would win, sometimes the Spawn, but the dwarves soon became the clear victor.

Eventually Armok started to grow bored with her as well, putting less and less effort into each new world, until he finally got sick of Holistic. He struck her with a curse to slowly turn her back into the demon that she was before, saying that if she couldn't provide him with excitement once more, she would perish with the world in her old, skeletal form.

So Holistic, faced with destruction, made the spawn once more, adding contagions to their bite and other horrors to the world. She accepted the challenge, determined once more to win.

(Draigneane): One-hundred iron spikes have been produced thus far. Only two-hundred-thirty more are needed.

(Splint): Wow. That's a lot of pointy sticks.

(Mr Frog): O_O

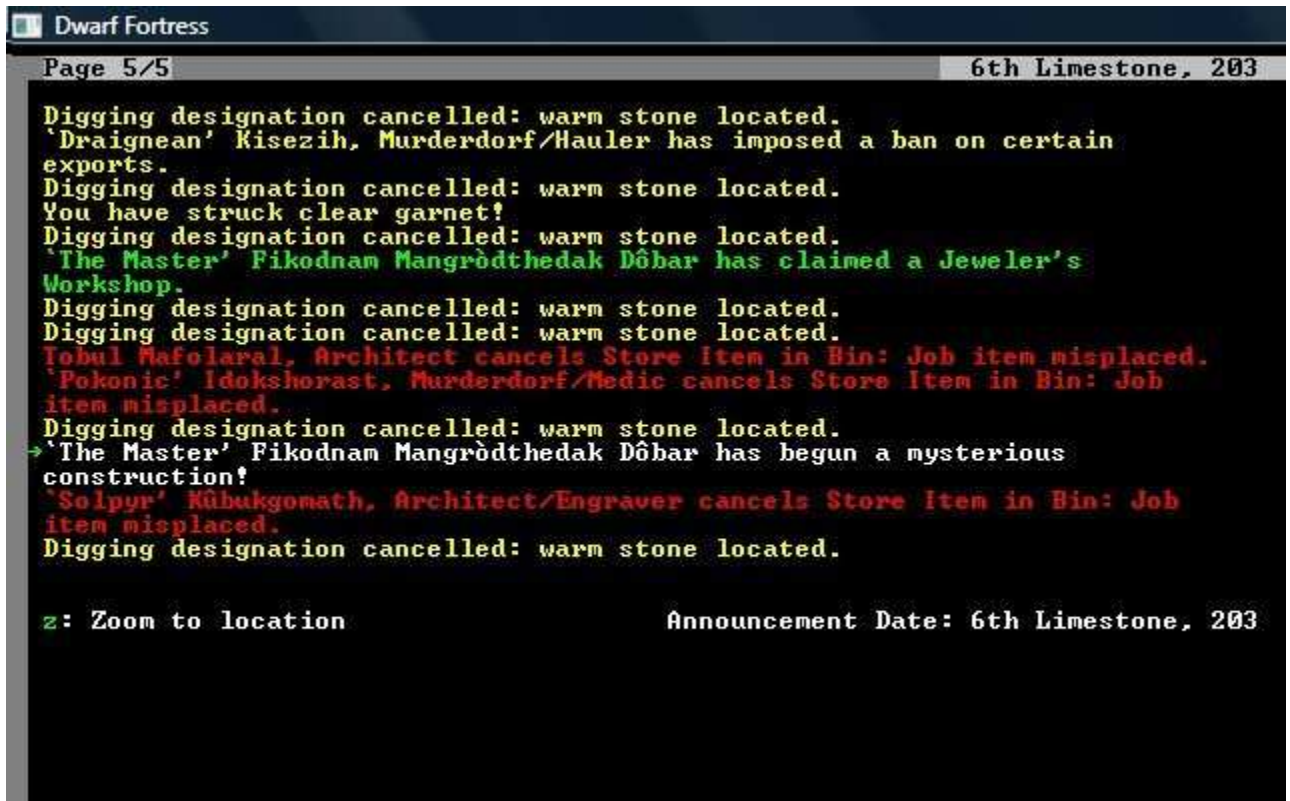
This is a well-crafted fortress. This item menaces with entirely too many spikes of iron. On the item is an image of 'Mr Frog' Spishabtham and mugs in cavy bone. Mr Frog is in the fetal position.

DRAIGNEAN:

Dwarf Date 203.07-5 The closed gate is trying everyone's spirits, I keep telling them just to open the thing and let the friendly spawn in, but I'm steadfastly overruled each time. Only one minor engraver whose name is very forgettable upholds my side of the argument, apparently for the chance to see his "Spawny" again. Good lad, little soft in the head, but he supports the things I support so he must have gone right somewhere.

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Dwarf Fortress
Page 4/5 6th Limestone, 203
'Doctormonch' Ingizhâsen, Smeltdorf/mason cancels Make adamantine wafers:
Needs 1 adamantine strands.
'Rochia' Fikodsâkzul, Miner cancels Store Owned Item: Item inaccessible.
'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor cancels Store Owned Item: Item
inaccessible.
'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor cancels Store Owned Item: Item
inaccessible.
'Kannan' Posicen, Head Doctor cancels Store Owned Item: Item
inaccessible.
'Rosan' Oledbikdâ, Armorer/Farmer cancels Store Owned Item: Item
inaccessible.
'Mr Frog' Spishabtham has created a masterpiece!
'Mr Frog' Spishabtham has created a masterpiece!
'Stausic' Amecshibbi has created a masterpiece!
'The Master' Fikodnam Mangrødthedak Dôbar, Murderdorf/FarmHauler cancels
Construct Building: Taken by mood.
The dwarves suspended the construction of kaolinite Cabinet.
'The Master' Fikodnam Mangrødthedak Dôbar, Murderdorf/FarmHauler is taken
by a fey mood!
Digging designation cancelled: warm stone located.
z: Zoom to location Announcement Date: 5th Limestone, 203
```

The Master has responded to being denied the chance to kill things by throwing our jeweler out of his workshop and claiming it for his own. I had no idea the man knew a thing about jewelery.



In this time of strife I've also mandated that we should put a hold on our export of quivers. I have found that they make excellent hats, and we need to investigate their use as fashion accessories before we export them as war supplies.

Dwarf Date 203.07-6 The Master has started the construction of his project, taking only a single blue garnet from our deep mines.

Some of the others have complained mightily about his terrifying screams as he works the stone, but I've known him long enough to know he isn't dangerous. Everyone is just overreacting.

Dwarf Date 203.07-19 Migrants have arrived, normally I'd rejoice, but these fellows have positioned themselves neatly in front of the spawn. They're trapped like fish in a barrel, just waiting around for the spawn to disembowel them.

```
You have struck microcline!  
→ Some migrants have arrived.  
Shorast Dodókatöl, Trader is no longer
```

I watched from the observation tower, shouting advice occasionally when one was in a tricky spot, and apparently "Hide in that barrel, like the wily fish!" was quite helpful advice. The Dwarf I gave it to threw his shoe at me as a gift shortly before the Spawn bit his brains out of his skull. I don't know if I'll treasure this shoe always, but it's the thought that counts.

The migrants have been killed to a dwarf, which neatly solves the problem of letting them into the fortress AND keeps them from mourning one another in single

mas'ers'roke (My calendars have stopped going missing, but now parts of words are missing. This is becoming 'ksome) of my brilliant plan.

Dwarf Date 203.07-21 The Master's rather unhealthy interest with inanimate objects is spreading, Urvi decided to adopt his own iron shield. He spent most of the morning making sure that it was warm enough, and then wiled away the next hour attempting to feed it some mashed plump helmet.

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'Urvi' Ducimnekut, Murderdorf/FarmHauler has grown attached to a iron shield!
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Thank Armok I'm sane enough to show that Shields prefer meals of minced dragonfly brains. I don't know what I'm going to do if this continues, probably name my armor felicity and take it on long moonlit strolls.

That really doesn't sound so bad...

Dwarf Date 203.08-2 I've begun construction on a project that will build off my earlier successes in suicidal attacks that only succeed by virtue of the stra'gic use of negative space.

I've ordered the miners to dig furrows straight into the ground, the won't be able to climb back up until they reach the bottom of their shaft, and some of them have grumbled about how "We'll all starve to death before this gets done!", but I know this to be just the sort of weak willed and lazy pandering that laborers always use when I assign them to dig hundred foot deep by three hundred foot long pits without food or water.



Dwarf Date 203.08-15 We've dug out an old set of mechanisms, mechanisms that I'm told are so valuable that they're worth more than our entire militia put together. Of course the value is relative; after all, our entire militia together can attack and be killed by an invading force. The mechanism can neither attack or be killed since it is an in'imat' (Are those teeth marks?) object. This logical process clearly demonstrates the superiority of our militia to a set of mechanisms.

Even in light of their obvious shortcomings I've decreed that these mechanisms will be used as the control thingy for our defense doom-ih-hicker.

Dwarf Date 203.08-17 Tragedy! One of our precious iron mail shirts has been stolen from our iron citadel! Splint assures me that this is impossible as we are under lockdown, but I know it! Somehow I feel the loss of this iron mail shirt as keenly as if I had seen it with my own eyes... Oh, Felicity, I couldn't bear the thought of that happening to us...



A thief has stolen a -iron mail shirt-!

Dwarf Date 203.08-20 I've going to go check on the master, people have started complaining that he has been stabbing people with his newest bride. Nonsense of course, -though the bleeding dwarf (Rolf I think? I'm calling him Rolf now anyway, and that's what I'm putting in the census.) who was holding his intestines in with his hands showed his disagreement by fainting on my floor- but as a good overseer I've ordered Ashsaber the second, myself and Fischer to investigate.

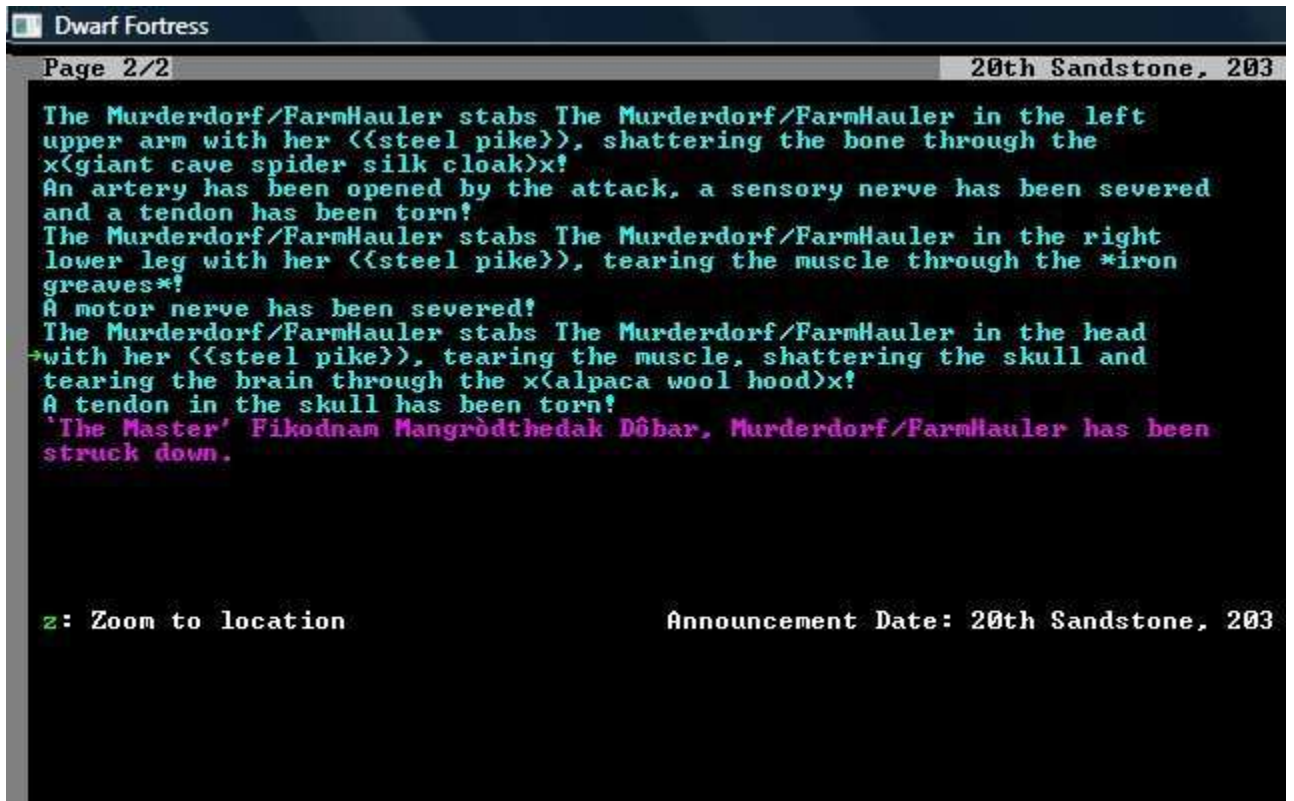


Dwarf Date 203.08-27 Apparently that ex'nguinated (Hmm, does it still count as learning the word if you make up half of it?) dwarf was right. The Master was in a bit of mood, laying about with that spear of his and saying something about how the blue garnets were telling him to do things with our intestines.

Ashsaber was the first to arrive, ably blocking the first sequence of strokes, but equally unable to strike a blow on The Master. He decided to change things up a little after that by blocking the Master's fist with his face, and then letting The Master shatter his right arm to lull him into a false sense of security. Sensing victory Ashsaber then dropped his pike and collapsed to the ground, assuming the fetal position and crying while The Master stabbed him to deepen the ruse.

It is at this point that Fischer and I arrived, and with pikes in hand we proceeded to use them to repeatedly bludgeon The Master into submission. He was, after all, our friend, (and he'd be a pain to haul into a coffin.) and so we attempted the non-lethal methods first. After we'd removed all of the teeth from his skull with our pikes we realized an important fact, The Master was not a bumble- removal of his teeth did not make him any friendlier.

Toothless and mad with rage (hilarious I say, some disagreed, but if you can't laugh at a toothless dwarf shouting obscenity at you whilst dripping bloody spittle from his chin and brandishing someone's guts from the end of his pike, then what can you laugh at?) The Master assaulted us with renewed vigor, striking Fischer a grazing blow to the forearm and bruising my leg. I retaliated by stabbing him in the liver, the lung, the foot, and by bruising his traitor's heart. Fischer, always efficient, settled for disabling his limbs in a quick one-two, then finishing with a lightning stab to the head, killing him instantly.



Luckily, our clothes were fairly unspoiled, though The Master's gear is covered in a couple layers of unidentifiable horror. Ashsaber had apparently gotten suckered into his own ruse, forcing us to haul him to the infirmary to receive treatment.

Rolf appears to be surviving his injuries, though the small pile of external organs beside his bed is starting to freak Splint out.

Dwarf Date 203.09-4 The miners have finished digging the little pits I asked for, and not a one of them starved like they said they would. Of course, they all complained of dehydration and ran to deplete our booze reserves after they dug their way back to the surface, but hey, that is their job.

I've mandated that the iron works push out as many pointy things as they can, I don't care what kind of pointy things, just so long as they are indu'tably pointy. (Alright, I've blocked out all the entrances to my room that are large enough for the Cavy to get in, how in Armok's infinite beard is it still eating my precious words? Can cavies use doorknobs?)

Dwarf Date 203.09-13 My Beardsense tells me that our liaison has arrived, unfortunate as we have yet to determine whether the friendly spawn outside are capable of recognizing traders and diplomats as friendly. (I've had this job for nine months now, and I still can't tell.)

Dwarf Date 203.09-15 Ech. The Master's corpse is deter'rating rapidly, probably because the dwarf who I charged with reassembling him into his coffin has busied himself carrying the Master's teeth to the coffin one at a time. I don't blame him for

that, The master had notoriously sharp teeth, but I do wish he'd delivered the meaty bits first. The smell is upsetting Felicity.

Dwarf Date 203.09-20 The spawn are leaving! The fact that this group was indeed friendly has now been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. How do I know this you ask, my dear journal? Because they left the merchants and the diplomats alive!

It would seem that the spawn were only standing outside to guard us from the dangers of the outside world, the matter with those migrants must have been a... m'sunder'ding. (That. Is. A. Fingerprint. A WERE-CAVIE HAS BEEN EATING MY PAGES?! This explains everything. EVERYTHING!)

Dwarf Date 203.09-25 We've thrown open our gates to sun and star once more, letting in the first dwarven caravan since the start of my illustri's m'oral appointm'nt. (That's it. I'm going to carry my calendars around with me from now on, no leaving them unsupervised.)

(On second thought, that seems like entirely too much work. I'll have Talvi follow me around on my rounds, then SHE can carry my calendars.)

SOLPYRE:

In tribute to a great and long awaited writeup I made this:

MY BEARDY SENSE IS TINGLING!



{I wonder if anyone will get it...}

(Mr Frog): Sus, in the event that Draig doesn't finish the trap, you are to finish whatever's left to be done before building yourself a giant phallus out of mugs or whatever, comprends-tu ça?

(Sus): Aye. After all, dead dorfs yield no Mugs for the Mug God.

(Draigneau): 151 iron spikes have been completed as of now, and I believe I can have the trap operating to a useful degree by the end of my term. Oh, and Splint is a lazy bastard. He ate, drank, and took breaks for the entire

duration of the caravan's stay.
(Total specs for the trap,
84 mechanisms
3 stone
1 door
1200 iron spikes)

(Sus): I like those figures.

(Splint): There's a reason why I set depots to anyone may trade. You know how finicky fortress merchants are about working during caravan season.

(Mitchewawa): I do hope you're using only top quality mechanisms.

(Draigneau): HAHAHA! You tell funny joke.

[[Talvieno's note: The mechanisms were top quality. The spikes, however, weren't.]]

SOLPYRE:

In Solpyre's Chamber

In the dark places beneath blood soaked hill and booze soaked halls there is a passage that leads downward into the earth. The walls are rough hewn and shadows fill the corners and cracks. One such shadow conceals a small fissure in the rock, down near the floor, where only the groping hand of a dwarf on his knees could find it. At first the fissure might seem too narrow to squeeze into but a persistent dwarf could do it, with time and a few unpleasant contortions. Any dwarf who did would find that the fissure leads through the wall and opens out into a small chamber after only a yard or so. The chamber is a near perfect sphere with egg shell smooth walls. There are uneven lines of writing running in a circle around the entrance, mostly written in rusty red but here and there engraved into the stone.

I found it. I made it, this place. The teeth led me here and it was waiting. It was here and I was waiting to find it. Teeth make tiny clicking noises if you drop them, then they bounce away. The teeth led me here CLICK CLICK CLICK. Yes, as if they knew it would be the perfect place. I was more careful after that. Mouths carry teeth so easily but I carry teeth one at a time now.

The lines of writing begin to move outward from the ring around the entrance into a expanding spiral.

Begin at the beginning. His hand had clauses from holding poles so much. His hand dove into the bin I was carrying like a dagger into flesh at the table. It came out holding the blue thing. BLUE SHARPNESS TOO NEAR THE EYE TOO NEAR. Yes, he held it up to the light to look at it and I saw. In my head. In the reflection of his blue face. Tiny reflection, sharp and clear I saw. I dropped the bin on my foot. I knew, I didn't have to watch what happened later, I already knew.

I couldn't tell anyone. I tried, it was like the word he says. He has to say the word ,

he has to, no choice. SHOUT RED WORD TO THE CEILING. It was like that, the opposite of that. No choice, had to be silent.

I didn't have to watch what happened but I did. Something broke, I heard it. Something else broke too, silently. He only said the word once. It wasn't enough. The word wanted more, saying it wasn't enough he had to DO IT. No choice, CARNAGE.

After the red word stopped and he was dead. Free from the word, that red word, wouldn't set him free, not after the thing broke. I found the first thing that broke, afterwards. Didn't know what to do with it until the teeth led me here. BLUE THING NEW-MADE UNMADE. His teeth. Just one more thing to do and then I'll be free of him. He is free of the red word and after I finish the picture I'll be free of him.

In the center of the chamber floor is a spearhead made of blue garnet all craftdwarfship is of the finest quality. It is broken.

MR FROG:

Journal of Mr Frog

Entry #3060

Draigneau, having apparently fallen under the impression that HS-2 are our friends, attempted to razzle-dazzle the dwarves into allowing him to let them in for a round of drinks. I really wish I could say that I was surprised by the previously-unprobed depths of stupidity that this demonstrated, but I frankly believe that this is merely a sampling of what that moron is capable of.

Fortunately, the dwarves promptly vetoed his proposal by way of violently dogpiling him (unsurprisingly, he appears to have deluded himself into believing that this was a gesture of solidarity). I'm happy to say that I finally no longer feel as though I'm the only one here with any amount of common sense.

While the melee was under way, I could just barely hear a faint voice calling out in support of Draigneau's proposal; however, I could not locate its source, and it didn't sound to me like any of the dwarves currently living here. It sounded... strange. I will have to investigate this further.

Talvieno seems to have developed a keen interest in chemistry; she has been coming to me quite often for assistance in preparing various substances, and I have started to occasionally allow her to assist me with my own projects. She's always very enthusiastic. I'm very pleased to have cultivated a love of science in one of the dwarves here; I now finally feel as though there is some hope for this place.

[...]

Entry #3070

A group of migrants got ripped to shreds by the HS-2 still roaming outside. I watched the whole thing on the surveillance feed. I couldn't look away.

I'm still greatly troubled by the repercussions of my actions -- even more so now that I've witnessed them up close. If I could go back to before the moment where I first released them and stop myself, I would. If I had to, I would happily kill myself many times over in as many timelines as necessary if it would mean that this never would have come to pass.

This whole affair has made a mockery of the scientific ideals that the corporation -- that I -- once stood for.

[...]

Entry # 3075

The experiment has turned out to be a failure, despite promising initial observations. The Master has apparently suffered the rapid deterioration of cognitive abilities associated with a failed mood despite having had all the materials he needed ready at the workshop he had claimed.

I feel responsible for this; I should use more discretion when dealing with sapient test subjects. Still, the fight for greater scientific knowledge cannot be expected to be without casualties.

I think I've figured out what went wrong, though I'm a bit leery to run another test seeing as how I've already caused a fatality. I'd hate to waste test subjects.

[...]

Entry #3082

The HS-2 have retreated, ignoring the traders and liaison that had recently arrived on our lands. This is very interesting; I was under the impression that HS-2 would immediately attack any nearby organism without hesitation, only moving on when they ran out of things to kill. This would appear to contradict that.

I am certain that this is merely an anomaly, however; we have comprehensively documented the characteristics of both known strains of HS.

I maintain that there is no reason for this experiment to have been carried out save for upmanage's own seemingly-insatiable sadism. If I get back, I'll have to redouble my efforts to have the corporation reformed.

SPLINT:

24th Timber, 204...203? I don't even know anymore. Interim entry.

Hello journal, been a while since I had to go and spill my guts to you hasn't it? I've spent so much time bookkeeping and whatnot I simply didn't have time to write. The Master seems to have finally lost it.... Such a waste of a good dwarven hero...We arranged for a decent burial procession to what we've taken to calling simply "The Clover." Talvi began work on it, but was unable to finish it before Mr Frog took the pressure off her stress-addled mind. Everyone was present for the procession, and

Draigneau tried to give something akin to a eulogy. Not quite sure what emu and yellow zircons have to do with The Master going bonkers, but Fischer brained Him with his pike in the middle of the word 'stupidity' and did a better one better fitting a solder. Also, some odd little fellow who jotted a name into the census said that the engraver, SolPyre, theorized the busted speartip we found in the gem shop was what caused him to lose his mind; A single misaimed hit with a chisel and he finally lost it.

I've made official inquiry with Draigneau and Mr Frog to see when this... Terbaheks... Terrfa... Terrahex! My, that boy has poor penmanship... Anyway, I've decided to look into his arrival, as before his little visit the other day I didn't even know he was here. Or... maybe it was a ghost of one of the caravanners? Eurgh.... I must've accidentally drank from Mr Frog's mug again. I swear, we have so many still that we've all gotten some kind of oral disease at some point. And those of us who accidentally drank from Mr Frog's mugs... let's leave it at the results are *not* pretty. Mostly this is due to the horrible night terrors everyone but Mr Frog experiences with the majority of his concoctions. Left everyone a bit... on edge.

I do have to commend Draigneau for his plan to make a massive spike trap, making use of our huge reserves of excess iron ores. I've also lodged a formal request to have our melee forces expanded if possible. Sharpshooters are all well and good, but they can scarcely strike the death blow upon those... things... I haven't had a chance to ask Mr Frog about the sword I gave him, but I left a note pinned to his door regarding complete weaponization.

-Following is an image of a sword with a cutting edge made of tiny serrated discs, Splint Lokumeshesh and Mr Frog Spishabtham in dimple ink. Splint Lokumeshesh is handing the sword to Mr Frog Spishabsham. Mr Frog Spishabsham is taking the sword and thinking.-

SPLINT:

*The following is a poster found plastered across many a leaving caravan wagon. Most simply consider it a jest. Those returning equally assure it is not: The fortress drowns not only in blood, but **mugs**.*

MUGS ON SALE

ALL MANNER
OF STYLE
ONLY AVAILABLE
AT SPEARBREAKERS



Contact Fortney
Merchant for
ALL varieties

On the back is hastily written on each in redroot ink: DWARFKIN PLEASE! WE BEG YOU STAY AWAY! STAY FAR AWAY!!!!

TALVIENO:

From the Journal of Talvi Diamondknight

Unknown Date *(The date has been, it appears, literally eaten out of the journal)*

Mr Frog's ever so nice. Everycavy (I like that word) knows that me an' Mr Frog are workin' together now, 'cause he's showin' me how to mix up potions an' stuff. See here now, I went over to him to figger out if he was messin' with my calendar pages - or Draigneans, really - but he started to learn me how to use the potions an' stuff hisself. All for me! I tried to be the sweetest cavy I could for him. He told me it's science, but I know what it really is, anyhow. It's right magic, that's what it is, through and through. He says he can teach me ever'thing there is to know. I come back every now and again an' he shows me more.

9th of Limestone, 203

Weird things is happenin' here... But it's good stuff, too. Draigneans wants really bad to change our way of doin' things. He wants to make our own culture. I don't see why - ours is plenty good for me. He might change the food a bit, tho - I think food would be better with words in them. Why can't they make soup roasts with little letters? They could call it "alphabet soup roast" - it'd be awful good, what with all the little paper letters floatin' around in it. Anyhow, he wants us to all wear quivers on our heads. I thought it was cute, so I was tryin' it, but it kept fallin' off my head. An' then one time, after it fell, one of my cavies climbed into it. I watched, and I said to myself, I said, "Why, Talvi... Those would make awful nice clothes..." 'Cause see, nocavy likes to be naked. We get upset. So if we's made quivers - like right big ones - we ain't got to worry about bein' in the nude no more. I'm gonna find a leatherworker to help fit me for a quiver - big 'nuff for me to wear. Maybe the rest of the dwarves'll like it too.

On a related note, The Master's really upset. He's sittin' in his workshop, cryin' about his spear. I feel so bad for 'im... I think he thinks the spawn are comin' to get 'im. Or his pole. He really likes that pole... And I like it too. So big, and thick... I guess his new iron shaft is good, but I kinda liked his wooden pole better. Ya'll might think wood is all soft an' such, but that ain't how it is. His wood was always hard - he hurt a spawn pretty bad with it, he did, thrustin' it in. Then he got hurt, so it wasn't all good.

I'm sure Mr Frog would have a big pole too if he was in the militia an' all, but he isn't... Still, if he were, I woul'n' be able to watch him when he sleeps.

19th of Limestone, 203

I'm playin' with my cavies. Georgie boy is goin' a courtin', so he has some flowers with 'im. Alana is his sweetheart, but she's *awful* shy. She's got an elf name, and she don't like it none - she's so ashamed. She tries to hide under my bed when she sees 'im comin', but that's where Tobias lives. Tobias drank somethin' Mr Frog made a while back, an' he's huge. He made his nest unner my bed, and that's where he stays. Sad, tho' - I cain't talk to Joseph no more while he's there an' all... Last time I checked, I thought I saw someone else there - a dwarf... but I'm sure I weren't seein' things right. Still, I thought he looked cute... but then I looked again and he

weren't there, so I was seein' things. I see things a lot now.

Oh, but about Alana, sweet girl... She cain't go unner the bed where Tobias is 'cause Tobias would have a fit. He don't like anyone who's noisy bein' near 'im, and Alana likes to sing. She has such a pretty voice, but all the other dwarves say I'm makin' it up an' they cain't hear it. I think theys just likin' me to be insistin' it's real for some reason. Mr Frog just laughs when I tell 'im... I think he might think I'm jus tellin' stories to amuse him, but I dunno... Speakin of Mr Frog, he jus ran past my door, runnin' for his room - yellin' somethin about migrants. Draignean ran the other way, an' he was yellin' about migrants too. I know where he's goin' to - he's runnin for th tower I built. It's scarin' poor Alana, now she's tryin' to hide under the bed again... I think I'm just gonna close my door. All this mess out there ain't helpin' poor Georgie boy with his shaky knees at all, and he's so nervous he's eatin' his flowers. Bad Georgie, that was for Alana. How d'you think you're gonna get her wooed if you cain't even keep from bein' nervous around her?

3rd of Timber, 203

Lots of stuff's happenin' round here, but I haven't written here for a spell. First off, The Master got killed dead. He got mad that he broke one of his jewels, an' he tried to take it out on everycavy else. They didn't like it, and though he hurt poor Ashsaber II pretty bad, ol' Fischer still took him out. He's a right powerful dwarf, he is. If I didn't like Mr Frog so much (and if I didn't hate Fischer) I might like him... But he's not nearly so smart as Mister Frog. Or as romantic..... I had another dream about him last night..... but I'm distractin' m'self now. Anyhow... Draignean's also diggin two big holes. I dunno how he thinks that'll keep the spawn out, but I can say it'll sure keep me in. I don't wanna have to walk between them to go outside... I don't think the spawn are none scared of fallin, tho'. They'll come right in anyway. Oh, and most importantly, Draignean tried to keep me from gettin' his calendars! He blocked off all the little spaces of his room - I'd been crawlin' in there like a cavy does. I found a lot of little holes in Spearbreakers - and I like goin' in 'em all, and poking things in there. Some people don't like it none, but some do. Anyhow, now I gots to use the door instead, like I used to. So I'm kinda sad right now. Billy and Georgie are tryin' to cheer me up by chewin' on my socks, but I don't know... my toes feel so naked, I'm embarrassed.

17th of Timber, 203

We had the funeral for The Master yesterday... it was all sad, really pompous an' formal... Everycavy was wearin' all nice clothes and such... Seems all of everyone knew The Master. But I don't think he'd like his funeral - there weren't one drop of blood nowhere to be seen. I tole 'em that he wouldn't like it, I did, but they didn't listen.

We had a ceremony, affer everycavy was there. We all walked by the coffin an' looked at his teeth - I dunno why *he* wasn't in the coffin - it's not like he was missin'. I saw some folks trip on his rottin' corpse on the way into The Clover. Anyhow, we all piled past an' looked at 'is teeth. Somebody tried to lay a gold rose on them - some poor girl who'd had a crush on 'im, or been secretly in love - but Fischer was standin' guard and he stopped her. "Best not to disturb the dead," he said. I thought it was real dumb - it was just teeth, an' everybody was trippin over The Master in the hallway outside anyhow. I got all mad and stormed up to him with my cavies and tole him down right there. I tole him good, I did. I said now, I said, "Now here, Fischer. The Master ain't in th' coffin, he's out in the hallway, an' you didn' have no trouble 'disturbin' him by trippin' over his corpse on the way here. You let her put her flower in his coffin, cain't you see how sad she is and all?" But Fischer jus glared

at me an' said, "Go sit back down, please, miss Talvi." How rude of him. But then 'gain, he never did like me none, after I accidentally locked him in the old armory.

Draigneane got up after the ceremony an' said a good piece about how emu leather an' yellow gems could make a right nice sash... I cried a bit, I'll admit. My covies would've too, but they don't never cry for some reason. It was so touchin', how the giant emus live an' give their lives to be made into pretty stuff... just for us... just 'cause of how much they love us... oh, gods, I'm cryin' again. Anyhow, Fischer *ruined* it by bashin' good Mayor Draigneane on the head with a pole. Draigneane thought it was funny, but *I* thought it was *rude*. I really hate Fischer... He's so... so... so *awful* and such.

Then Fischer had the nerve to get up an' start talkin' about The Master like he knew 'im. Sure, they were in the militia together an' all, but they weren't e'en good friends! If I have my way, Fischer'll never be in charge o' the fortress. Anyhow, Splint's been workin' late nights with Mr Frog... I miss Mr Frog so bad, he don't never have time for me anymore. He always tells me, "Another night, Talvi", an' goes back to workin' on his weapons. He ain't even in the army! What's he got to need with weapons??? I miss workin' with 'im like I used to... Feels so long ago now.

Anyhow, I wonder if I can have The Master's pole... I'd like to play with it.

19th of Timber, 203 (*This page is covered with green-brown fingerprints, and while legible, is difficult to make out*)

I got the nerve to go sneak into Mr Frog's room t'day, while he was out... I was gonna jus see what he an' Splint were workin' on all the time that makes me miss out on time with my true love... But then I saw some of his notes... I couldn't stop m'self. I tried, I really couldn't, I just *had* to see... I *had* to see what they tasted like... But they wasn't paper... I don't know what it was, but it made me feel sick to my stomach. What does he write those notes on?? Then as I was rushin' back to my room an' all, I accident'ly bumped over one of his mugs and got somethin' sticky all over my fingers. I still hain't gotten it off. I went to Draigneane's room a bit later and tried eatin' some more of his words, thinkin' that would help m' cavy tummy - it usually does - but it tasted bad too. And there was a weird flavor to them... Every time I stuck my fingers in my mouth with a bit of calendar I could taste it... Why would his calendars taste so weird an' all?

27th of Timber, 203

Yay! Draigneane's lettin' me follow him around - used to be that he wouldn't, but I knew he liked me from the start, when he gave me the title "Cavy of all trades" (I got it memorized now, yay! It's so long). He let me hold his calendars - I get to hold them, and he's right there!!! It's my job to keep them safe from covies. Well... I'm not a cavy, I'm a dwarf. Or sometimes I think I'm a cavy... But he don't know that...

I'm gonna do all I can to keep this job good an' all, I'll do all he wants me to an' more. It'll make it harder to check on Mr Frog at night, but it'll be good still. I don't have to sneak around for Draigneane's calendars no more... But wait... If I eat them now, he'll find out it'uz me! I cain't have that now none... Oh, gods, what'll I do?!? Mebbe if I jus wait til he's back in his room at night, and sneak into his room like I do Mr Frog's...

SPLINT:

This is a simple recruitment poster, one of many throughout the fortress and leaving with every dwarven caravan. All writing and imagery is done at sub-par quality in redroot ink. All posters were made by a "Col. Fischer" to encourage migration of other war veterans, scouts, and hunters. He unfortunately forgot to include the name of the fortress.



TERRAHEX:

Diary of Terrahex Part 5

Guess what Diary?

Apparently, the Spawn completely decimated the zombies and sent the necromancers back to whatever hole they crawled out of, and everyone was relieved from the emergency burrows which is good. Everyone was starting to sober up and tempers were beginning to flare.

The spawn are still outside the fortress, and the fortress is sealed. I've been thinking of that howling that I heard, but I just didn't hear it clearly enough. I want it

to be Spawnny's, but at the same time I don't want to disappoint myself. Even if it was Spawnny that howled at me, there's no way that I could find out 'cause the fort is still sealed.

Draigneane must have realized that the Spawn are living creatures just like us. He held a vote to let them in, and I voted to let the Spawn in (nobody noticed me at all). No one else shares his revelation though, and even I have my doubts about the idea. The military would never trust them and would just kill them all without mercy. I wish I could talk to someone who could talk back to me, Diary, I really do.

I've been being a lot more cautious lately, too. I'm not really sure how Draigneane saw me in the first place. It's not particularly bad that I was seen, but I don't really know how to act in a conversation. You know how I get, Diary. I don't know who it was that I vomited all over, but I should say sorry and be friends with that person! I suppose that it's actually good to finally be noticed!

Diary,

I've had you for awhile now, and I know you must be impatient to get back to your owner. I do feel guilty about keeping you so long...

Today migrants were spotted outside the fortress, but the Spawn are still outside so the gate is still closed. That's good because that means that they have to open the doors!

Hey Diary,

The Spawn killed all the migrants as soon as they saw them. They must have been zombies or something. The fort is still sealed, so someone obviously made a mistake.

I still think that we should let them in and show them our best hospitality. The military rotates in weird shifts with long periods of time when nobody is on duty, so we could just let them in while they're not looking. I should make a gift for Spawnny if she's with them!

Oh no Diary!

The Master must've gotten tired of the spawn being outside so he began hallucinating! He had made an awesome spearhead out of gems when I came in to see how he was doing. He suddenly went berserk and started yelling at no one in particular to leave him alone.

He was screaming and stabbing the air for awhile before Draigneane and Ashsaber went to persuade him to stop. The Master then promptly stabbed Ashsaber for "getting all up in his grill" then began dancing while draigneane removed his teeth. honestly, I would never have believed that story if I hadn't been there getting my intestines removed.

It's sad that The Master died. All he wanted to do was kill things.

Dear Diary,

I had to sew my own stomach shut because I just couldn't go talk to a surgeon. actually, I'm not even sure if we have a surgeon. Hmm. I should check some time. he must not be noticed much just like me! we could be friends and stuff!

The Spawn left when the caravan arrived. I would have said goodbye but when I got finished sewing myself up, the Spawn were just gone. I was sad, but it was for the best. the military was getting restless.

Today was also The Master's funeral. It was sad and stuff, but I didn't really know him besides when he stabbed me accidentally. A female dwarf tried to put a rose in his coffin, but Fischer stopped her. This made Talvi mad and she started yelling at him with a chorus of cavy whatever-you-call-the-sounds-cavies-make's.

Fischer still didn't give in and the rose was left out.

While Draigneau was giving his speech about how The Master will be missed, I stole the golden rose and put it in while Fischer wasn't looking. Everyone should be able to say what they want to to the dead before they never see them again. That's what I believe, Diary.

This is the last time I'll write in you, Diary

I won't even have you for very long, Diary. I thought of a way to find your owner. I've had you for way too long. I should have just asked someone until I found your owner, but I'm just too timid. I found a bin in the stockpile that wasn't too full of mugs, so I dumped it out and hauled it into the dining room. I etched the words 'lost and found' into its side.

As I write this, I'm sitting right next to it. This will be the last time I ever write in you, Diary. I hope your owner finds you. Please don't forget me.

[On the page is a meaningful picture of Terrahex the dwarf, a book, and a heart. Terrahex the dwarf is hugging the book. The heart is around Terrahex the dwarf and the book. Terrahex the dwarf is hard to notice. The drawing menaces with spikes of Terrahex the dwarf's teardrops. This object relates to the separation of Terrahex the dwarf and the book in the year 203]

(Draigneau): I have finished my term, how it ended is... ah... confidential. By the way, WHAT IN ALL THE SIX-HUNDRED-AND-SIXTY-SIX MILE STRETCH OF THE PHLEGETHON IS A LADY OF THE SPAWN?!

(Splint): I have no idea. Something Mr Frog added I would guess, since he made the raws.

(Terrahex): It's obviously Spawnny, now queen and come to negotiate a peace treaty. Let her in, oh wise one

(Splint): Is it wrong that I'm glad [Terrahex] isn't taking a turn?

(Talvieno): @Draigneau: Does she swim? Is her chestmouth stuck out of the water and clutching a sword? Is the sword pretty? If you answered yes to all of the above, it's likely safe. Go for it, get that sword!!!

(Splint): Ok, show of hands: Atomsmashing the possible whatever the hell it is.

(Draigneau): @Terrahex: I, uh... Already did. Thankfully spring came before she killed everyone, thus making it officially Sus' problem.

(Terrahex): Sus had better not kill us all, I love this thread

(Mr Frog): So, uh... how screwed are we? Relative to our usual level of screwed-ness, I mean.

(Sus): I *knew* I shouldn't have posted that comment about Draig having things "under control"... D:

Do we, uh, have any semblance of a useful military at all?

[[Talvieno's note: Interestingly, this is one of the few discussions that *didn't* get derailed.]]

DRAIGNEAN:

Dwarf Date 203.10-7 Winter is being gentle this year, letting our underwear remain remarkably free of snow or ice. Talvi is doing an excellent job helping, though she spends a great deal of her time getting 'opinions' from Mr Frog.

Splint has been taking his ease this season, apparently the exhaustion of being so constantly excited over his job as adamantite extractor is taking its toll. I do wish that he'd decided to trade with the merchants before they left, but he must have needed his rest.

Ah well, I've decided to keep him on strand extraction anyway, better an eventful life filled with joy, terror, and other weird emotions than a grey, dull existence of peace and prosperity.

Dwarf Date 203.10-10 Wyz has finished burying all of the pieces of HARD's body, performing a rather touching private ceremony. I don't remember what he said, but I do recall that the little plump helmet muffins were to die for.

'HARD' Sholidzefon, Ghostly Murderdorf has been put to rest.

With HARD's burial his spirit has left our gates, It's almost sad to see our mascot go, but Splint insists that fewer moaning spirits with ghostly brains leaking out of their vacant eyesockets will portray a better image for migrants.

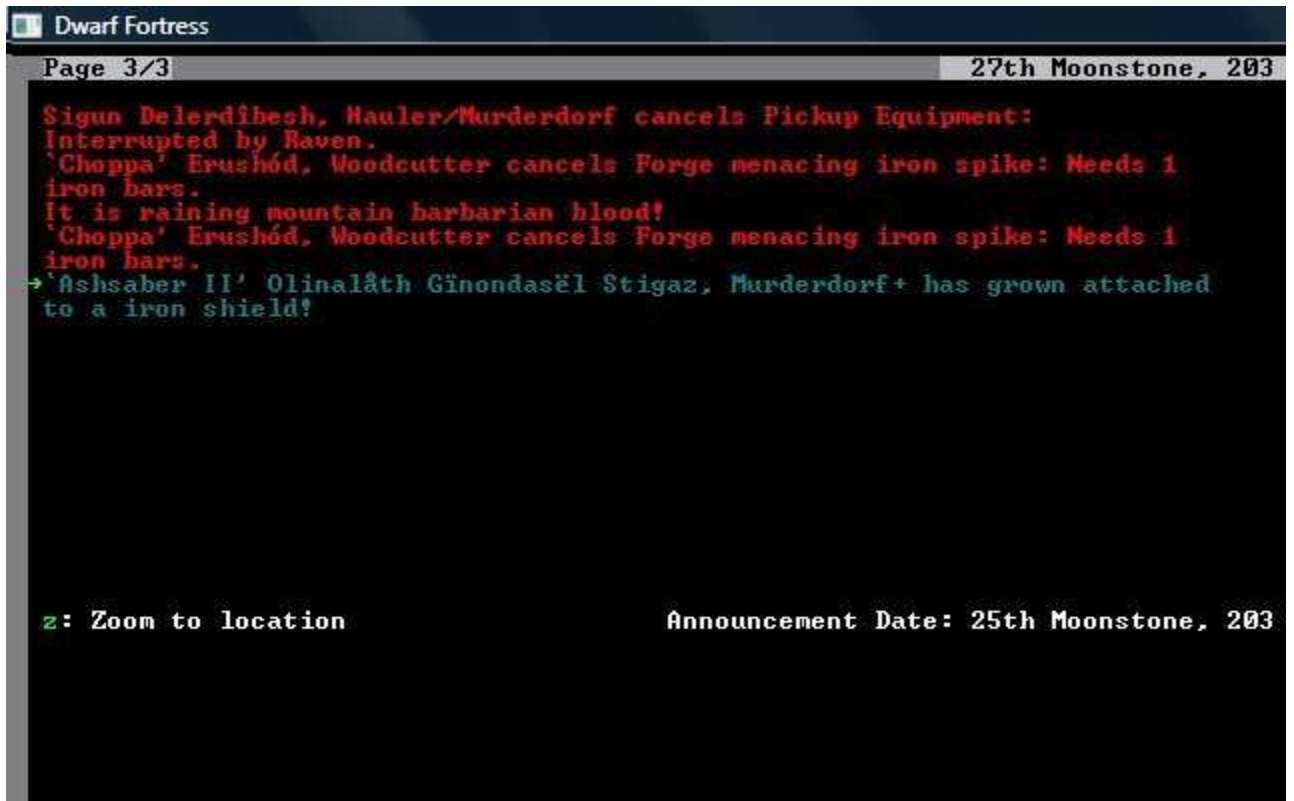
Pansy.

Dwarf Date 203.10-16 Mr Frog and Mekkia have been doing well on the bridge-trap-thing I designed. Mr Frog doesn't believe that I discovered the blueprints in a dream, gave them to Mekkia, and then lost them in another dream, but as long as he does his job he can believe whatever he wants.



Dwarf Date 203.10-25 Ashsaber the second has decided to give into the adoption fever, claiming an iron shield for his very own. He and Urvi are spending a great deal of time together, talking about how well their shields have been sleeping, and remarking as to the best ways to deal with rust spots.

Sigun has complained vigorously that he can't gather his equipment, running into my office to tell me that there is a raven nesting on it. I understand his t'pidation (Damn it, it is still happening! Is the were-cavie a ghost, is that it?), ravens are intimidating, but I've recommended that he stuff his pants with straw and try again.



Dwarf Date 203.10-28 A Coati is stealing our pants! Sigun, his pants still full of straw from frightening off the raven, informs me that his greaves were stolen by a Coati. Talvi got excited for a bit, but then we explained the difference between a Coati and a Cavi. She did however suggest that Sigun put rock nut oil in his hair and sit outside, using the oil and the prospective nesting grounds provided by his head as a means to lure the Coati back.

Dwarf Date 203.11-3 Our miners have complained of a lack of work since the trap construction started, and I'll admit that I've been busy with other, very technical, administrative duties. I've remedied this by assigning them to dig out more of that adamantine, it'll keep splint happy, and the rest of the military always seems more alert when I tell them that we're actively mining adamantine.

Dwarf Date 203.11-6 Since his untimely death I've adopted The Master's old bronze pike, Felicity doesn't mind, and the little fellow could probably use some love after he was forced to disembowel Rolf and stab me and Fischer. Poor thing.

Who is a good pikey wikey? You are, you are!

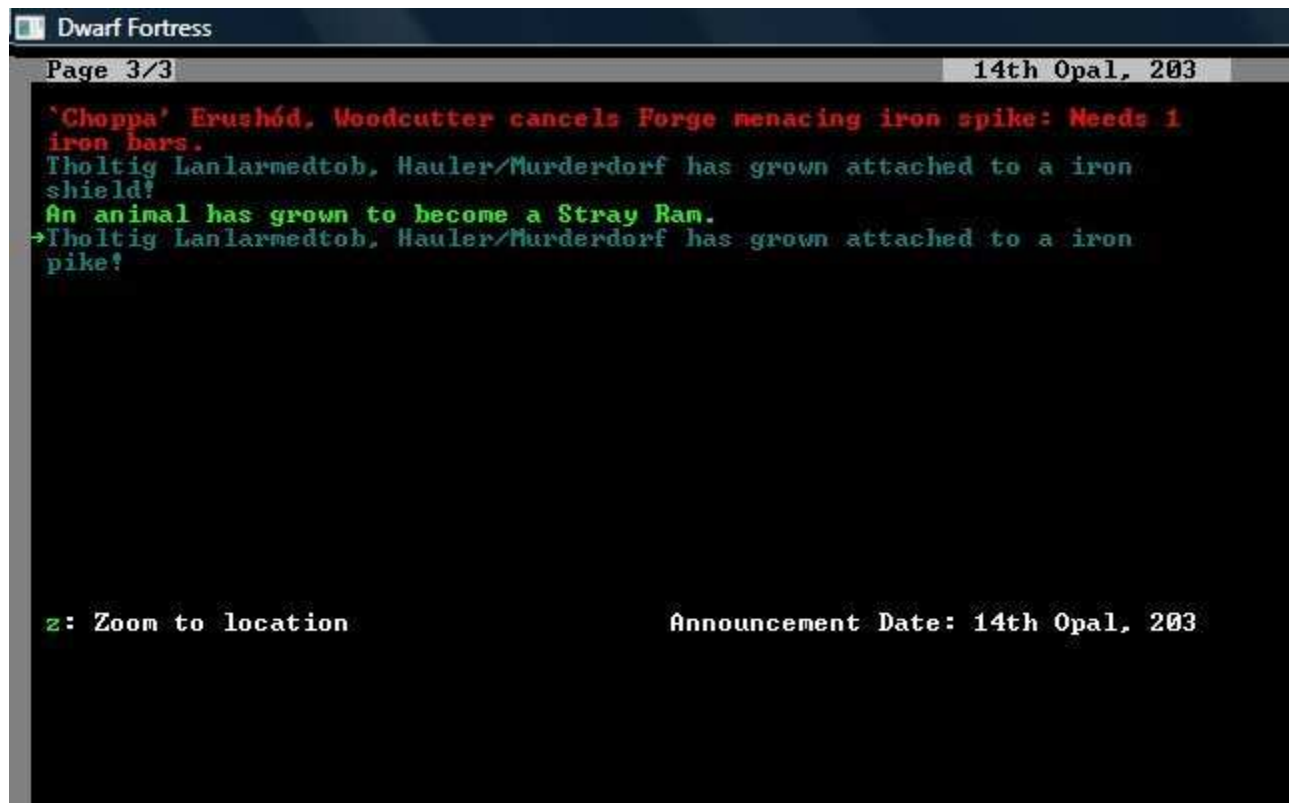
'Draigneau' Kisezihi, Murderdorf/Mauler has grown attached to a bismuth bronze pike!

Dwarf Date 203.11-13 The liaison from the mountainhomes is still here, requesting a meeting. I'm not sure I want to know what he wants, but I'm not sure I don't either. Is it news about my mother? Am I being promoted to Baron? Has our nation been conquered by giant mosquitoes?

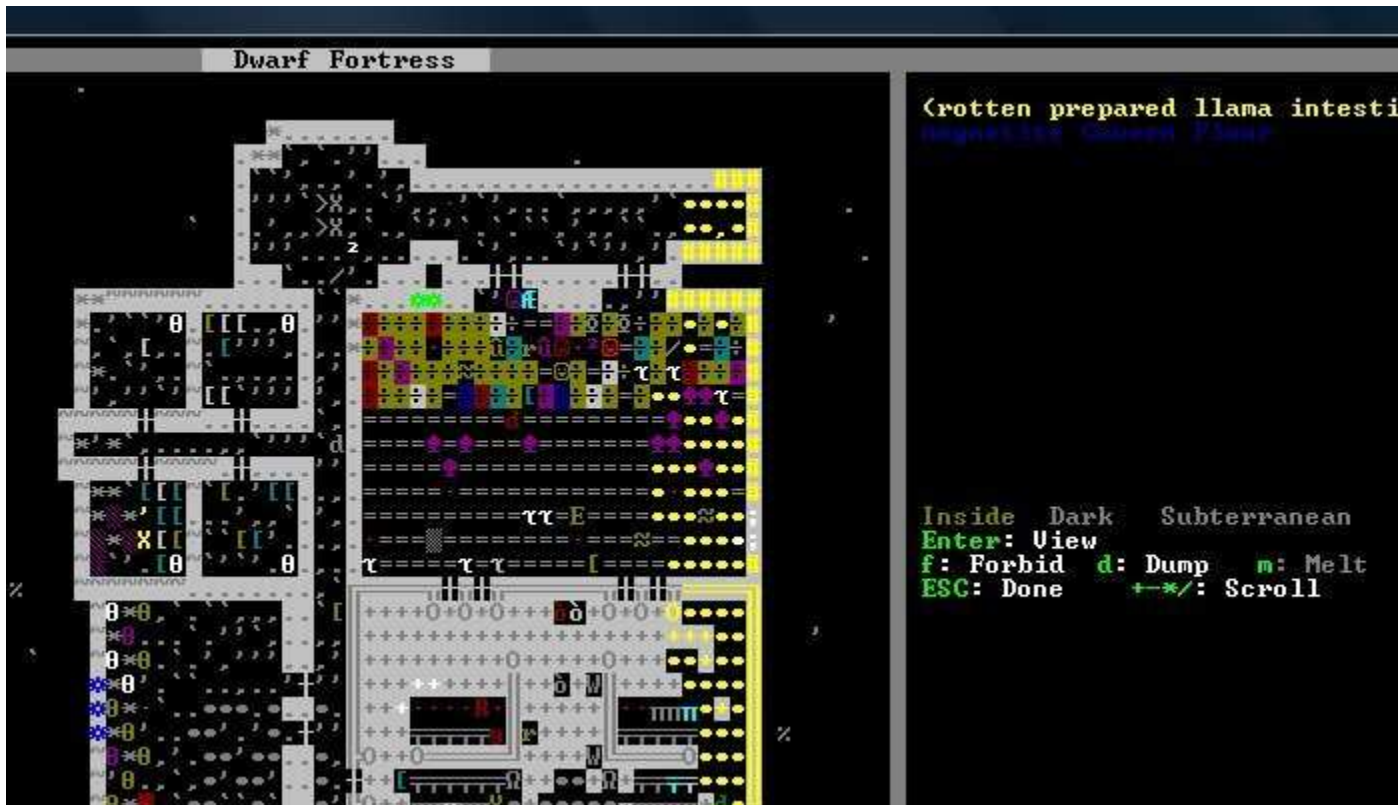
It's just too much... I'm going to avoid him, the shock of the suspense breaking might cause my beard to fall out.

Tholtig has also decided to practice inanimate adoption, though he has gone above and beyond, taking both his pike and shield as his "bestest battle buddies".

His shield can really hold its own in a drinking contest, the pike though... well I was able to take it after only two mugs.



Dwarf Date 203.11-18 I've sent a few dwarves to investigate reports of an ab'nable stench in the living areas. They've returned with news that the stench is coming from Fischer's room, strange.



Further investigations (we opened the door) have found that Fischer was snacking in bed, unfortunately she's a messy eater and she left a couple coils of rotting prepared llama intestine under her bed.

I will grant that it is disgusting, but who among us doesn't forget a couple loops of intestines now and again? No harm, quite a bit of foul, but no harm.

Dwarf Date 203.11-27 Stakud, one of the youngest children in the fortress, has fallen into a strange mood! Some of the usual doomsayers spin their tired tales about the end of days, but an artifact producing tyke is exactly what we need to attract more dwarves to the cause.

If this kid can make an artifact within the safety of our impregnable and well supplied fortress, than why can't you make a short trek across the spawn-like creature strewn and zombie infested territory to become a citizen of Spearbreakers?

Hm, I may have that message sent to the mountainhomes next caravan.

Dwarf Date 203.12-2 Stakud has gathered three pieces of wood, bashing them together unhappily in the craftdwarf's workshop he's decided to infest. He keeps shrieking about yarn, and I've ordered Rolf to get of his fanny and get him.

Rolf is recovered enough to take it with good humor, patting both me and the kid affectionately in the face before running down one of our stray llamas.

Got to admire that one, using his recently liberated intestines as a lasso is quite ing'ni'us. (I swear on Armok's infinite beard that I'm going to catch whatever has been eating my words, it's just a matter of time now.... It can't be invisible all the

time.)

Dwarf Date 203.11-6 Urvi has decided to adopt another shield. They sit beside him now, and he dotes on them while all the others ooh and aww over them.

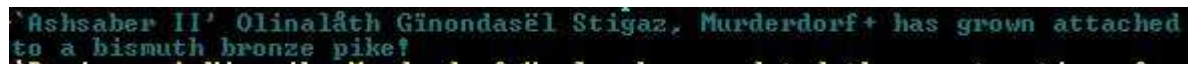
The army has certainly brought out the best in him, I wouldn't have trusted him alone with a mug when he got here, but now he's gained the responsibility and character to look after a pair of shields.

Fischer seems frustrated, but I couldn't be more proud.



Dwarf Date 203.11-10 Ashsaber the Second seems to have recovered nicely, he's back in training and has decided to look at me as his mentor, going so far as to take in a stray bismuth bronze pike (the twin of my own) as his personal charge.

He's spent the morning teaching it how to be thrust into someone's liver, Urvi has taken to covering his shield's innocent eyes to prevent them from seeing the gruesome lessons, but I'm with Ashsaber. The sooner he teaches his rod that it's not all fun and games, the better.



Dwarf Date 203.11-12 Urvi has talked Sigun into adopting a shield of his own, I don't know if Sigun's ready for the responsibility, but only time will tell. Ashsaber, Urvi, and Sigun have formed a bit of a club around their shields, and I'll admit that Sigun's is looking smart in that little cape that Urvi made it as a gift, but Felicity, what we have is so my better than that.



Fisher is less understanding than I am, ranting and raving about how they're only cold iron and bronze. She seems quite adamant about it, going so far as to suggest that we stop feeding our equipment. The suggestion is monstrous, and the assembled warriors (including myself) quickly vote her down.

What that woman needs is a good helmet to look after, that would calm her down some.

Dwarf Date 203.11-18 The deal is sealed against Fischer when Gemblade forms a deep attachment to his own axe. The two do everything together now, drink, eat, train, sleep, everything. The best part is that Gemblade's position as leader of the axes has opened his troops up to the idea of forming less casual relations with their

equipment!

No longer will the pikes be called es'ter'c (This cannot be! I kept a close eye on Talvi, no one attempted to pick her pocket, and my Beardsense detected no other intruders... The only time she went out of my sight was to visit Mr Frog... No, it can't be... could it?), now we shall be known as bold, adventurous, and a number of other very forgettable adjectives!

Dwarf Date 203.12-20 It would appear a might force of spawn has arrived at our doorstep. My dwarf sense combined with the shrieking of the kiwi inside of Mr Frog's device (The droppings from the Emu that was originally in the device were generating too many complaints) have detected the presence of sixteen spawn. One of their number is colored unusually -a daring pink look, not my personal taste, but one has to admire a spawn with a sense of style- and keeps gibbering commands to the others.



Mr Frog keeps swearing about the unusual spawn, mostly using words that I have, quite frankly, never heard before. This seems to further indicate that HE has been

the one stealing and consuming my calendars, probably part of some dastardly plot to wrest control back from me by taking all of my best words! I'll show him though, I've decided to test the bridgey-stab-fall thing I've had Mekkia build for me. I've decided to test it right now.

Mr Frog was as enraged as I had anticipated when I told of my plans, (proving that he has been planning to depose me all along, and steal Felicity too!) stating that the plan was ridiculous, I was ridiculous, and that he needed a drink. He might have also said some other things dear journal, but I don't want to repeat them in front of Felicity.

I know I'm in the right, and when Mekkia told me that she didn't think this plan was wise, I had only one thing to say.

"Mekkia, the last thing we need in the face of a score of ravening spawn is your 'I don't think that's wise' attitude, now open the tunnel to that bridge thing that you probably built."

203.12-26 It's over, it's finally over. The battle was long and hard, and the spawn got a little bit inside the fortress, but everything is taken care of now. For the annals of history I will do my best to recollect my genius campaign (how do you pronounce that? Cam-pain, Cam-paggin?) against the potentially evil spawn-like creatures.

The first blow was to open the spiked corridor to the spawn, an act which was simply achieved by sending a suicidally loyal miner –the same suicidally loyal miner that I had dig out the wall between our forces and the ledge spawn this spring- to dig a ramp up to the surface to allow the spawn into our fortress.

Meanwhile Talvi volunteered to pull the lever that controls the pointy stuff on the bridge. She's a good girl, a little gullible to let that traitorous Mr Frog eat some of my calendars, but a good lass.

Most of the bridge is still in'per'tive (DAMN YOU MR FROG, DAMN YOU!), but I am confident in the 18% efficiency that Mekkia tells me we have.

The spawn arrived in the trap shortly thereafter, running towards our fortress with the kind of suicidal tactics that I myself have used from time to time. Thankfully, that experience allowed me to formulate an immediate battle strategy: hit them until they stopped moving.

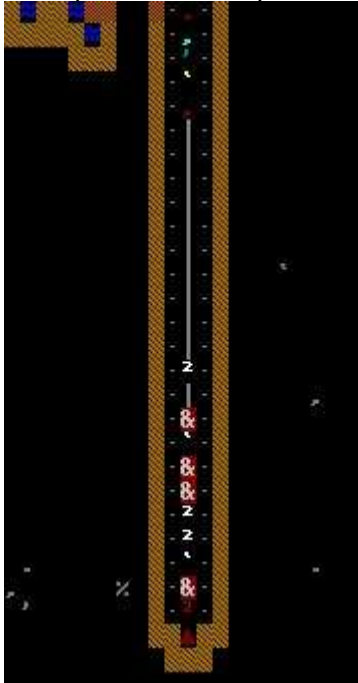
The first barrage of carefully laid spikes triggered by Talvi erupted through the lead spawn, piercing his head, both legs, his lungs, one arm, and spilling his foul guts. The creature, however, was of such innate tenacity that it did not allow such a small thing as being stabbed repeatedly in vital organs to slow it down.

The second spike barrage whipped out, and their line had advanced far enough for it to strike the first three. Dark blood and bits of limb sprayed freely, but I knew we had made a potentially fatal mistake. The spawn, though we had once managed to knock one off a cliff, do not actually bother to dodge out of the way of an attack.

It was in the Third barrage that our hope was once again ignited. Most of the spawn forces (including the lady) now straddled the working portion of the bridge, and the third flying thrust of our mighty spikes opened dozens of wounds, but only two were significant. A pair of spikes that bored directly through the centers of two of the spawn, shattering their black hearts, killing them instantly, made these wounds.

Talvi kept pulling and the spawn kept dying, with a hundred broken bones or deep seeping wounds to every blow that pierced a heart. The lady herself succumbed to the barrage after having her throat, brain, guts, and all of her limbs shattered and

pierced. The final blow struck her just as she was about to clear the spikes, lofting her up like a bloody beacon to our cause.



In the end, ten spawn were killed on the spikes of the incomplete invention, and the spawn that survived were so bloody and broken that they more oozed than walked. I can practically feel Mr Frog shaking with fury, my success ensures that he won't be able to use my words against me! The fool, the foolish fool!

To cement my victory I allowed the remaining six spawn into the fortress, ordering Fischer and Ashsaber the Second to assemble with me at a crucial chokepoint. The three of us would meet the six of them in battle, fighting them at unprec'ent'dly (Eat away, Mr Frog, you'll never eat my legacy!) heroic odds. The spawn charged us, moving with surprising speed for having just been liberally perforated by a hundred spikes. We charged back, Fischer and I leading while Ashsaber lagged a little behind. Fischer spent a great deal of a time bashing them in face with his pike, spraying dozens of teeth across the entrance. Ashsaber did his best to avoid getting killed while still striking blows here and there. I myself employed an old battle tactic, I imagined myself to be meeting with particularly unlikable diplomats, conducting the negotiation of a peace treaty. With that state of mind I flew the white flag of war, swinging the olive branch of peace about with enough force to shatter our enemies into a fair compromise.



Our battle lasted for four days, an irritatingly long amount of time. These spawn need to have more courtesy when dying, right now they take an absurdly long amount of time to do it.

Ashsaber didn't manage to kill any of them, but he seems glad enough to make it out of there alive and unharmed. Fischer and I split the kills, and on that day we both became known as legends among fighters. We were the dwarves who defeated six spawn like creatures in battle without taking a single casualty.



Dwarf Date 204.1-1 My squad has been greeted with laurels and cheers, the

bridge trap even more so. The common dwarf has been freed of his fear of the spawn, (though there was little to fear in the first place) our fortress defeating a full sixteen spawn without taking a single casualty has seen to that.

Still, in these last days it has become painfully clear to me that my position as leader has taken me out of the affairs of the common dwarf. The only acquaintance I ever bothered to make is long dead, the unfortunate victim of one of my earlier military actions.

I simply do not know what goes on in the mind of the common yokel, and it is time to give up responsibility, to recognize the greatness of another as my incredible, unbelievable, stupendous greatness was recognized.

To that end I've decided to sit in the dining hall, when the forty-second person comes through, I'll name them mayor. Then I'll be free to connect with the common dwarf and spread my blessed knowledge of tactics to the masses.

*And so ends the reign of Draigneau Firstmoss, bloodiest overseer to rule
Spearbreakers.*

So far.

(Draigneau): Food production is on the up and up.

Booze is decreasing slightly, so you might need to look into that, but it's not urgent. Adamantine production is stable but slow. We have 50~ units of worked adamantine and 350~ units of ore, plus some thread. The spires aren't fully mined out, the NE spire has some adamantine that you can mine in perfect safety, and the S spire has barely been touched.

The spike trap is not complete, but it is -as you have probably read- functional. I have designated the construction of a floor to cut it off from the surface again, this is to allow us to complete it without risking something using it as an entrance. (The lack of a F.R.O.G would make that a very unfortunate event.)

There are three levers in the dining room. The center middle lever controls the main bridge, that's the one that links up to the entrance with the F.R.O.G. The Top center lever (it's red and made with artifact mechanisms, and if you hit T it should show it be connected to a crapload of mechanisms) controls the actual spikes of the spike traps. The top center-left lever (it should be right next to the red lever, it itself should be grey.) links to the failsafe bridge that allows you to completely shut off the spike trap entrance.

Fischer and Draigneau are your best military dwarves, they're both legendary level fighters and very high level pikedwarves. They're both in squad one. (The go to squad)

EDIT: The kid making the artifact is still trying to do so, he's on the farming/storage level (the one that is in soil). Keep an eye on him, I'm pretty sure I set up some yarn to be made, but just in case. He wants rough gems as well, and to enhance the artifact I forbid everything but blue garnets and black opals.

The liaison is still after me to go to a meeting, so if you attempt to remove me from office before I meet with the liaison you will be unable to negotiate a trade agreement and the liaison will leave.

SPLINT:

1st Granite, 204. Interim Entry.

I'm glad that madman has finally left the office of overseership. Between the nigh constant heart failure at working with this cursed metal, a spawn attack that could have killed Fischer, himself, and Ashsaber II, And them decommissioning one of my Emu, I've had a horrid time so far. I can only hope that Sus can be trusted to not be overcome by madness like Draigneau was. It doesn't help that I, for lack of a better word, nearly shit my heart when I heard screeches coming from part of the fortress proper.

I must admit, early into the winter that fellow Rolf was rather impressing with the intestine lassoing of a llama (or alpaca, accounts seem to vary.) I've also notice one of our number is without a journal. Since damn near everyone carries theirs on a small chain around them, I'll have to dig one out of that lost and found bin someone set up in the mess hall so he has a means of maintaining his sanity.

Work on the weapons goes well as well. We've almost perfected the chainsword, as we're calling it, and Talvi had a flash of insight regarding a weapon that fired serrated discs of smaller scale. Mr Frog seems doubtful, but he said he'll see what he can do. She also asked why neither of us had thought to include our pikes in the research and testing, saying if the blade on the sword was so good, why not attach one to a pike? She may be a touch, well, stupid, but I must admit she can have a sort of blind idiot clarity from time to time. I can only hope I have enough time to write again when I return to that god awful extraction duty...

[I mentioned Fischer was a she, but after the blunder on Talviano's part I figured a crossdressing colonel confused for a mandorf would be funnier and decided to propagate it.]

[[Talviano's note: This has been moved to validate the chronological sequence, for your convenience.]]

MR FROG:

Journal of Mr Frog

Entry #3092

Draigneau wasn't listening to my and Mekkia's suggestion that we rig up a spike trap in our entrance, despite the fact that we desperately need some means of killing HS-2 that doesn't involve throwing soldiers at them until they can't kill any more soldiers, so I used a bit of drug-induced hypnotic suggestion. I figured that he'd be more likely to accept our ideas if he thought that they were his own. It worked very well, though he seems to be a bit confused. More so than usual, I mean.

I must admit that a great deal more of the plans than my pride would like had in fact been drawn up by Mekkia. Despite my initial opinions, these dwarves are acceptably-brilliant in their own right.

[...]

Entry #3099

It appears that more and more of the military have been developing pseudo-social bonds with their equipment. This is very strong evidence in support of Dr. Gladys's "Companion Cube" theory. Truly, this is a bright day for science!

[...]

Entry #3105

Draigneau has, in his apparently-insatiable lust for shiny things, ordered yet more of those infernal spires to be mined out!

I do now at least have a fallback in case things go sour, however. I don't know for sure if it'll work, but it had appeared to have had the intended effect on Draigneau earlier, so it should be okay.

[...]

Entry #3110

My hands are shaking as I type this... another wave of HS-2 has arrived today. One of them, a female, was larger than the others, and her flesh was covered with spiraling pink tattoos resembling long chains of serrated Spawn mouthparts. Also -- though I am reluctant to even entertain the notion -- it appeared as though she was commanding the rest of the horde; when she cried, the others would go silent and turn their heads towards her as though they were listening.

I am deeply disturbed by this. Neither HS-1 nor HS-2 had demonstrated any complex social structure beyond a basic swarming instinct, nor had they demonstrated the cognitive capacity required for complex verbal communication. What, exactly, *are* these things?

Fortunately, though the HS-2 apparently had the presence of mind to avoid reflexively dodging off our rigged catwalk and into the surrounding chasm -- again, very disturbing -- I am pleased to report that, despite the spike trap not yet functioning at full capacity (I had very strong words to say to Draigneau regarding his decision to press it into service so prematurely), it still inflicted a delightful amount of carnage on the HS, softening their ranks enough for our military to easily defeat them. I have added the footage of the HS walking through the trap to my personal archives; watching the abominations struggling on the ends of five iron spikes which had been rammed straight through their torsos is unbelievably cathartic.

[...]

Entry # 3114

I found a tack on my bed today, along with a note that said the following:

"How'd you like my cunning trap, you tr'sonous calendar-thief?

"You'll never de'uce who I am, but that's your own fault for picking a fight with a tacti'l genius such as myself!

"Sin'rely, Draigneane"

The recorded surveillance feed supported the note's assertion that it was, in fact, Draigneane who snuck into my room at night and placed a tack on my bed along with a note that directly implicated himself. There are no words for this, only gentle weeping for these dwarves' evolutionary future.

I need a drink.

[...]

Entry #3116

Shocking development today -- Draigneane has decided to give up the title of Overseer of his own accord. Though this means that I'll have to wait a bit before testing the untraceable poison, I am very happy that the situation resolved itself in a non-fatal manner. In fact, after Draigneane was finished with his theatrics, I went down to my quarters and danced a little jig (Accidentally knocking over my cabinet in a freak accident; really, even though I haven't practiced lately, I *can* still bust a good move when I put my mind to it). Anybody would be better than that lunatic.

[[Talvieno's note: Sus's turn sped by unbelievably quickly. Also, his initial entries were a lot more difficult to understand - I've rectified that for your convenience. (By the way, cannae = cannot)]]

SUS:

Start your day with Mugs

This is a Giant Emu leather bound journal. It describes the reign of 'Sus' Bibandeler as the Overseer of the Dwarven fortress of Spearbreakers, starting 1st Granite in the year 204. All pendwarfship is of the most mediocre quality. It is written in a relatively humorous tone and is rambling at places. This object is menacing with spikes of Giant Emu bone, Pine and Green Tourmaline. On the front cover is an image of mugs in Limonite. On the back cover is an image of 'Sus' Bibandeler the Dwarf in Hematite. 'Sus' Bibandeler is in a fetal position.

1st Granite, 204

Thank the Gods, the Spawn horde that shambled towards our fortress has been kill'd, in part thanks to the bravery of Ashsaber th' Second, Fischer and Draigneane, but mostly 'cause of the brilliant death-trap built by Mekkia. Even staked the "lady" monster leading 'em straight thru her black heart, it did. I don't think I've ever seen so much blood an' guts spilled all at once.

After the ungodly monsters finally stopped twitchin', Draigneane declared that he'd accomplished everythin' he set out to do and was ready to give up his position as Overseer of the fortress. His last act was to appoint a successor, as is Traditional. For

some reason I can't understand, he chose me. Now, I'm a simple 'dorf, one who understand's the ways o' Limonite an' Shale an' Green Tourmaline, not the complexities of managing a fortress. I never ask'd to be the boss of any dorf.

Oh well, like Talvi used to say, "If life gives ye Prickle Berries, ye cannae make +Yak Tallow Biscuits+." (Poor Talvi; she hasn't been the same in the head after th' first Spawn attack. I kinda miss her ol' folksy wisdom, tho' I still don't see what a Wren in a Featherwood tree has t' do wit' counting the days o' Obsidian...) Anyhows, Draig did point me to a desk that seems to hold the slabs an' papers doc'mentin' what he calls "the state of affairs" in th' fort, meanin' our wealth and the various work orders to be carryin' out. Just lookin' at all those numbers an' figures is givin' me a headache.

Time t' spit in me palms an' grab the ol' quill and pen, I guess...

SUS:

15th Granite, 204

Created Wealth:	1834610	※?	Population:	58		
Weapons:	20530	※	Miners	4	Woodworkers	
Armor and Garb:	86998	※	Woodworkers	3	Free Lords	
Expenses:	37110	※	Woodworkers	1	Swordswarves	
Other Objects:	1030190	※?	Stoneworkers	2	Swordmasters	
Architecture:	312229	※	Rangers	3	Messedwarves	
Displayed:	281191	※	Metalsmiths	4	Mace Lords	
Held/Worn:	66360	※	Jewelers	8	Hammerwarves	
			Craftswomen	7	Hammer Lords	
Imported Wealth:	197283	※	Nobles/Admins	1	Speardwarves	
			Peasants	3	Spearmasters	
Exported Wealth:	15775	※	Dwarven Children	3	Marksdwarves	
			Peasants	7	Elite Marksdwarves	
Food Stores:	1505		Farmers	4	Wrestlers	
Meat	None	Seeds	956	Engineers	13	Elite Wrestlers
Fish	None	Drink	145	Trained Animals	108	Recruit/Others
Plant	181	Other	223	Other Animals		

Wow, this management stuff sure is complex. Glad t' have Splint helping me figure this stuff out...

From what he tells me, I gather we're set up pretty good for now. We've got enough food for now, and drink production is... well, there's a bit of shortfall there, but nothing serious.

I also reviewed our military reports. From what I've read, things are pretty calm right now. Sure, there's some sort of reptile monster roaming in the caverns, but it *should* be cut off from the fort for now. The only other openly "hostile" things are the poor erstwhile soldiers in their isolation cells, groaning and bellowing in their own strange tongue.

Citizens (58)	Pets/Livestock (121)	Others (16)
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Capybara		Wild Animal
Dishmab Koganmishos, outpost liaison		Diplomat
'Nomia' Zatthuditon, Ghostly Hunter		Undead
Stumeb Siga Ukla, Forgotten Beast		Unmuted Guest
'Softa' Omristlikot, sergeant		Berserk
'Ashcaber' Othilvutok, sergeant		Berserk
Magma Crab		Wild Animal
		Wild Animal

v: ViewCre, c: Zoom-Cre, b: Zoom-Bld, m: Manager, r: Remv Cre

I intend to take advantage of this pause in th' attacks to get all the goods left behind by th' merchants to someplace safe, so as my first official order I reclaim all of them and tell the haulers to get that junk in a stockpile somewhere. (Although I'm still a bit lost as t' where that "somewhere" would be.)

Also, hasn't *anybody* thought about house-training all these dogs, at least? I swear, if I step in anoth'r little "surprise" left by Dorf's best friend, they're all going to have a li'l meeting with Bombzero down at the butcher's. For now, I assign all of them to military training, save the puppies (who are also getting house-trained). A lot of the other animals get sent ta' Bombzero's realm anyways. On can barely turn a corner here and not run into a stray donkey foal or whatever. Time to tone down the bestiary a bit. Emus, both giant and otherwise, and sheep are spared from the mass butchery for now.

Now just to figure out the rest of this mess... For example, nobody's bothered t' mark the levers around here in any way. I *think* Draig said something about that fancy red lever in the dining hall bein' linked to th' spikes and 'nother one that opens th' entrance bridge... As for the rest of 'em, I'd proba'ly better leave those well enough alone unless I absolutely have to try 'em.

...and where the heck are our stockpiles and workshops? 🤔

Right after the surface is declared safe again, a throng o' migrants pours in, with a fella that claims he's a "trader" and sticks around at the outskirts o' the fort, instead of comin' in or doin' anythin' useful. What a loony... Guess I leave him alone for now; let the poor fool come beggin' to be let indoors come the next ambush...

I also send some of the guys out t' gather plants an' fell some trees as long as we're able. One can never have too much wood in store. Almost immediately, one of our lumberjacks gets pounced upon by a goddamn capybara, of all things. He ends up with a nasty lookin' bite to the chest. I tell the military folks to get rid of those damn giant rodents, pronto. Eventually they do,

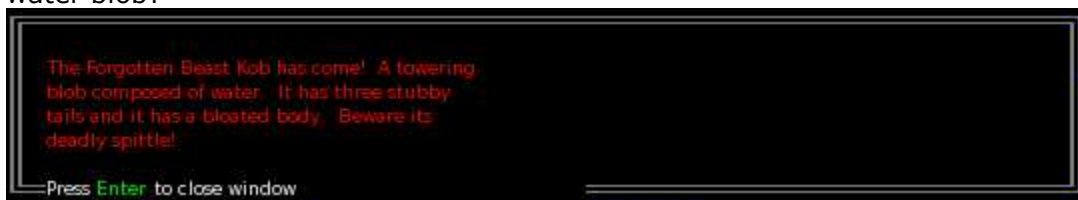
Sigun even punches one in the head so hard it drops on the spot. The wounded lumberjack is trying to limp t' the hospital.

I need a drink. Again.

Update, 27h Slate, 204

Finished assignin' jobs fer the no-good lay-about's calling themselves "migrants". Also cleared all of the "jobs" Draigneane has assigned himself to avoid meetin' the liaison. "**La la la**, can't hear you, moppin' the floor here, **la la la**!" An' since that fool of a liaison still thinks Draig's th' mayor, I cannae meet 'im meself. Oh, the indignity! (Tha's a word I learn'd from one o' those silly calendars Draig kept 'round before somebody started eatin' 'em.)

But what's this? Me *beard sense*'s tinglin'. Somethin' foul has come. Some kind o'... water blob?



Fortunat'ly, the thing is contained in the caverns. Let it rot there for all I care!

(Mr Frog): Spearbreakers Lesson 1: Everything is trying to kill you. Including the cute water rodents, apparently.

SUS:

1st Hematite, 204

'twas an oddly calm time at Spearbreakers. Th' days o' late Spring passed idly without incident, until one o' the crafts'dorfs - Strazxa I think 'is name was - started actin' all weird, rollin' 'is eyes an' shoutin' all kinds o' nonsense.



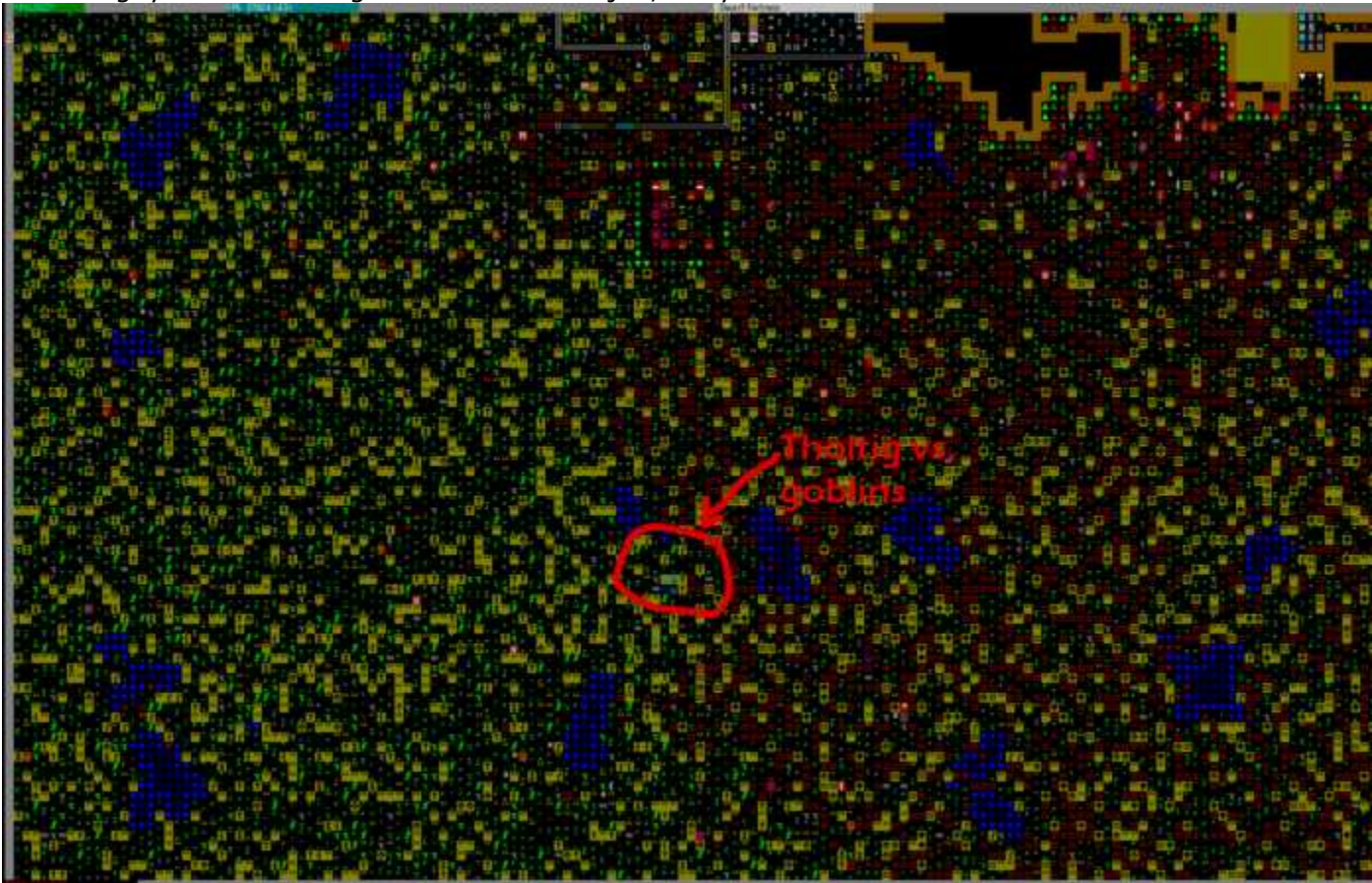
'e ran straight fer a Craftys'dorf's workshop, kickin' out the previous occupant, an' started runnin' round grabbin' stuff.

As th' inhabitants o' Spearbreakers started t' wander outside again, I noticed they

found a lot o' dead migrants there, so I decided our lov'ly Shamrock o' Tombs needed expandin'. I set some miners to the task and had a pair o' Mason's workshoppes start makin' coffins fer tha poor sods.

As if pull'd in by the stench o' death, an Elven caravan show'd up outta tha blue. Got some lov'ly Barbarian blood rain on them, too. Tho' I don' think much o' tha tree lovers, I had Splint an' the mates scrounge up some stinkin' ol' (troll fur sock)s an' what hav' ye. Told Splint to throw in a few shiny mugs ta sweeten th'deal and bought the pointy-eared buggers' whole invent'ry o' booze plus some exotic animals, berries an' such. I hear sun berries make good drinkin'. Not sure what a "sloth bear" is good fer, exactly, but they sound plenty fierce so what the hey... Also giant bushtits(*snicker*) an' giant barn owls. Those shoul' tear at least th' Goblin scum a new one.

Hot on th' heels o' tha elves, a bunch o' Goblin ambushes strolled in town. Almost soil'd me pants when the woodcutters started screamin' "An Ambush! Curse them!" at the top o' their lungs; was pretty reliev'd to see 'twas just the ol' greenskins. Nothin' our militia cannae handle. At 'em, boys!
Before the militia had a go at the greenskins, they did a number on that crazy "trader" guy. Serves 'im right fer not doin' 'is job, I say!



Tholtig, always the go-getter, thought he'd take th' green menace all by 'is lonesome. Turns out, th' greenies still had some fight in 'em, so Tholtig got two broken arms an' a mangled nose an' ear for 'is trouble. 'e lost a lot o' blood, too, and fainted on the spot. The goblins then tried to bash 'is head in fer a pretty long time; thanks ta 'is -iron helm-, they don't quite manage to finish 'im off.



The rest o' the ambushers then tried to force their way into the fort proper, but Draigneane an' his mates had a different idea. After all was said an' done, all three o' th' Goblin raiding parties were more or less dead, along with a thief or two. I think it was Ezum who pull'd Tholtig's bleedin' ass outta tha proverbial fire an' into a hospital bed.

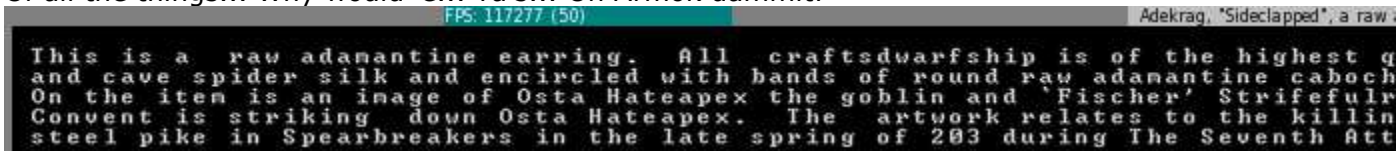
A pair o' war dogs also bit the big one, but all in all, we beat th' sneaky little bastards with little losses.

Meanwhile, it seems Strazxa found all the crap 'e was lookin' fer an' finished makin' whatever it was 'e was thinkin' to make...



STRAZXA!!! 🤡

Of all the things... Why would' e... Ta's... Oh Armok dammit!



Tha's exactly what 'e did; all that precious Adamantine an' 'e' thinks to go an' make an earring o' the stuff. No shield, no armor, no spear; a bloody earring!

Welp, Splint tells me tha thing is worth 639600 x or whatev'. I don't care. Useful things is what I want, not shiny baubles. Oh well, at least it has an inspirin' image on it.

Speakin' o' which, I've started buildin' a new archers' tower right near our new entrance. Could prove useful sometime in the future, givin' I get tha Marksdorf trainin' underway sometime soon. After all, we already got some pretty mean-lookin' Spawn bone crossbows...

An' thus ends th' first season o' Spearbreakers und'r me leadership. Not a very

eventful one, but knowin' this place, tha's one thing that's gonna change. Spent most o' th' time figurin' out the ins an' outs o' tha place anyhow.

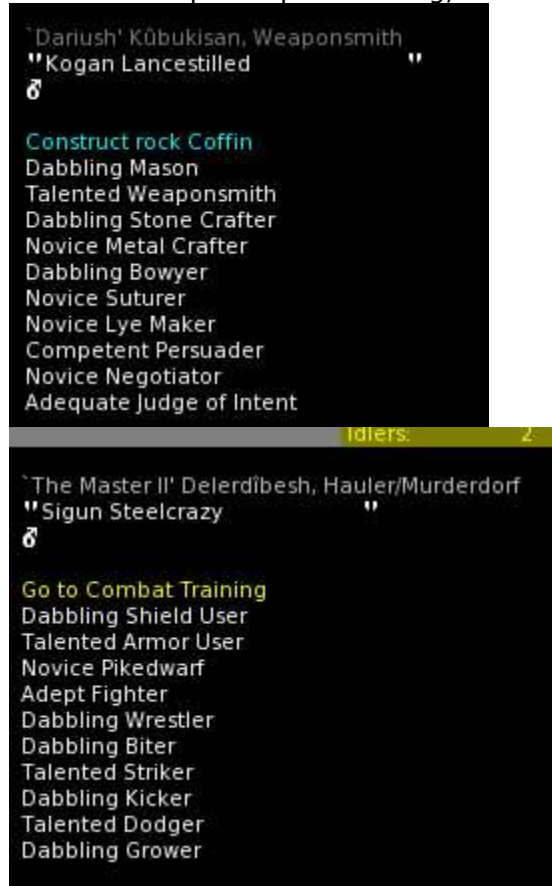
P.S. Draig still strolls 'round like 'e owns the place, just 'cause that dolt of a liaison cannae be bother'd ta speak with 'im. Personally, I think that goblin's arse of a "diplomat" is just too happy ta be dippin' into our booze stocks...

Quote from: Draigneau: Have you disengaged the failsafe?
The who to the what, now?
Which lever?

SUS:

(The following notes have been hastily scribbled into the margins of the page, seemingly as an afterthought)

- Set up a second still, made of brass bars. Can't go cheap when booze is in question!
- Dariush and The Master II have been dorfed as the closest match I could find. Sadly, no legendaries available, so I picked the most skilled unclaimed weaponsmith for Dariush and the best available fighter for The Master II. Dariush has all labors disabled except weaponsmithing, metal crafting and suturing.



(Please don't kill me...)

TERRAHEX:

It was a quiet night throughout Spearbreakers. It was one of those rare, magical times when the only enemies were the dwarves infected with Spawnitis during the year of Mr Frog. Now it was the first day of the year of Sus, the fifth ruler of the fortress.

Mr Frog was drawing plans in his room. The plans were for a sword that would rend flesh like no other. Splint pointed to various pieces of the drawing, using his finger to indicate the circles that small serrated discs would rotate in. at this point it was a regular sword with small, small serrated discs running around the edge. Last week it had been a large small serrated disc put on a stick. Before that it had been just serrated discs at the hilt of the sword to grind an opponent's weapon to dust.

Talvi had fallen asleep in the hall, her covies sleeping around her prone form to hide her if Mr Frog happened to leave his room that night. She spent days in a row deprived of sleep by spying on her crush. Earlier in the day she had been carrying Draigneane's calanders for the last time during his reign, her tummy was full of bits and pieces of the words that she didn't understand, trying to digest the knowledge.

Draigneane was currently in the barracks sparring with Fischer and Ashsaber II. He was ecstatic as the clock turned 12 and his overseership was stripped from him, yelling about how he was now humble and modest as Fischer and Ashsaber tried to pummel him to the ground to make him go to sleep.

Terrahex was snuggled up in a corner, too timid to ask Splint for a room of his own. Yesterday he had slept in the fields, but that had nearly got him found out in the morning when there was a dwarf shaped imprint in the mud. He was dreaming of a land where Spawn and Dwarf could walk hand in claw.

Bombzero was dancing while cutting meat in the butchery. It was spawn meat, but she figured that what Splint didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Her voice rose as she sang Stairway to Armok, her blade cutting through flesh like it was wet paper, blood splattering the ground around her feet.

A woman wept as she opened the door to the graveyard, falling at The Master's coffin's foot. She had been his wife at their previous fortress and had just arrived months before he had gone insaner. The Master had gone ahead of her to secure a place for them to live. She cried for his death and the loss of the golden rose he had given to her at their wedding. Opening the coffin to get one last look at her husband, she found the rose, much to her surprise, clasped in his hands over his heart.

Mitchewawa was lying in his bed, consulting the cracks in the ceiling and contemplating how he was the only one who made any sense around here.

Solpyre was in his chamber, consulting maps and records, knowing that something was missing to this puzzle. He knew something arcane was here. He just knew. It was either here or would be here. He puzzled at the broken blue gem that was supposed to be a spearhead. Images on the side told an arcane story that had driven its creator mad to record. He would solve the mystery. It was only a matter of time.

Choppa was grumbling at his forge about how he came here to cut wood and now he was just about as far from the surface as Spearbreakers gets. He turned out another iron spike, musing about how he was helping the fortress while simultaneously cursing Draigneane and his fore fathers.

Meanwhile Sus was sitting on his bed, his head in his hands. "How am I going to

do this?" he muttered to himself. he was overwhelmed with the responsibility, not knowing how adequate he really was for the job.

SUS:

19th Hematite, 204

The production o' iron spikes be lagging behind. I immediat'ly order the forges t' turn out as many spikes as dwarvenly poss'ble.

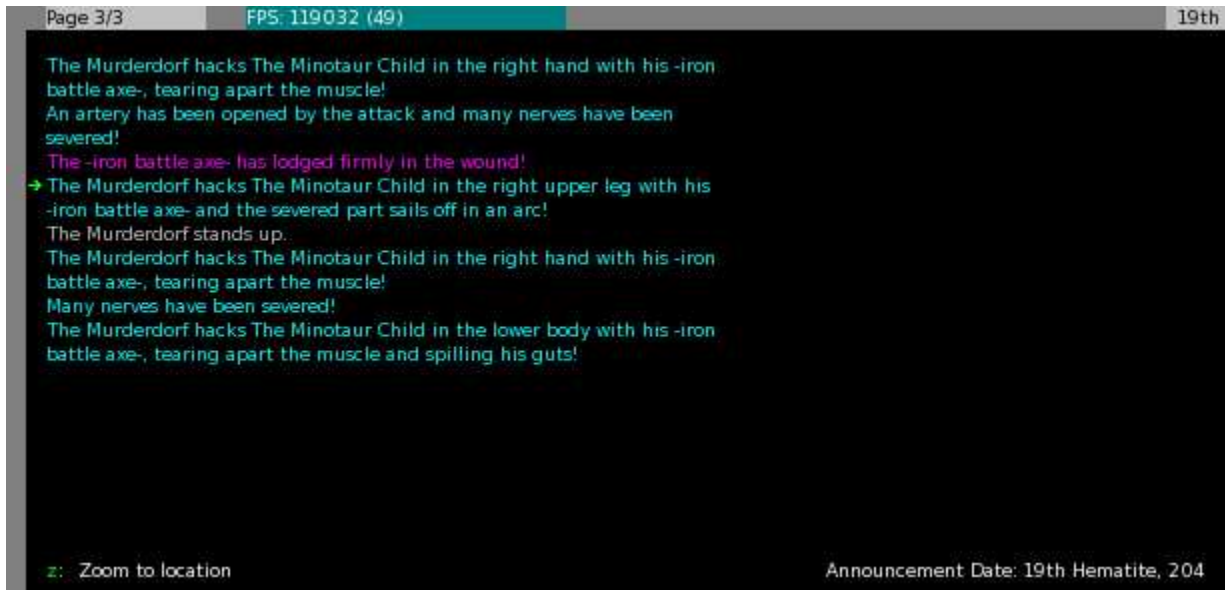
While I be attendin' some o' tha less pressin' matters like bedroom designations, a commotion comes from the outdoors.*



Some kind o' weird bull-headed humanoid shows up at our doorstep. Like many others b'fore, it makes a beeline for th' fort entrance.



Tho' it be hard t' see thru all the miasma waftin' about, our militia an' war dogs go 'bout their business at 'eir usual eff'ency. In the end, Gemblade chops th' brute ta bits an' spills its guts all o'er the floor.



Cannae call it a pretty picture, but what can ye do; th' thing had it comin', thinkin' it can just walk into Spearbreakers like that.

Now ta clean up th' mess... I guess I'll need ta reclaim the gear o' the fallen goblins an' that minotaur thing, if it had any. Also need to be thinkin' 'bout beefin' up our military a bit; tho' they're plenty capable, our killin'dorfs are spread a bit thin. I figure a fresh recruit or two a squad woul' give 'em a bit more time ta catch their breath 'tween the brawls. Also need to be thinkin' 'bout that marksdorf squad.

*I C wut U did thar. 😊

15th Limestone, 204

After the bull monster bit it, I set about t' produce s' more weapons for th' militia. Some pikes an' battle axes are in order, at least. Crossbows we have no shortage of, as I'd set those on repeated product'n earlier and forgot about it for a time. O' well, at least we've got a quality crossbow or two for av'ry marksdorf.

I went ahead an' declared myself Mayor, no matter what that twat o' a diplomat says. 'e seemed to make a big deal out o' it, screamin' all about "outrageous behavior" or whatnot an' sayin' he had importan' friends and tha' I'd be punish'd. I helped 'im out th' door and gave 'im an encouragin' kick on th' rump ta send 'im on 'is way.

'nother wave o' migrants strolled in. I told Splint t' set them workin' on whatever he thinks they're good fer, or hauling if they've no useful skills. On the other hand, some o' the patients in tha hospital didn' make it, either due to wounds or th' fact th' medics responsible fer feedin' em seem like a bunch o' the laziest louts I ever set eyes upon. Rolf an' Ashsaber II, at least, are no long'r wit' us. Seems 'twas a timely decision ta make more room in th' Funeral Clover. (Somedorf's been so bold as to even stuff their pet in one o' th' coffins. Hrmph.)

There was a longish quiet while 'fore th' human caravan show'd up. They'd almost made it inside when the greenskins made 'nother pass at robbin 'em. I sent th' militia to tha gates, seein' there's nae much threat from a couple o' goblins.



[[Talviero's note: taken from Google Images. On the forums, the link is broken. My apologies for the size.]]

But somethin' was off here; these goblins seem'd much more organiz'd than their usual ilk. I was surveyin' th' battle from a lookout point when I saw it: A creature much taller an' bigger 'n any goblin. A Spawn of Holistic! How in the Gods' names coul' such a thing be leadin' a band o' mangy greenskins? 'twas most troublin'.

Page 1/14
FPS: 118709 (49)
21

the Goblin Maceman Stosbub Bostongdostngosp is fighting!

the Feeder Telkud S&szl;zulstettad is fighting!

the Goblin Pikeman N&szl;ko G&szl;ng&szl;rsbu is fighting!

the Trader Melbil Mitig&szl;ng&szl;iz is fighting!

→ the Holistic Spawn war leader Vutok Tish&szl;wutok is fighting!

the Goblin Maceman Zol&szl;k Zol&szl;klo&szl;ss&szl;om is fighting!

the Goblin Pikeman Ng&szl;sl&szl; R&szl;nv&szl;song is fighting!

the Goblin Pikeman Ng&szl;om Ub&szl;st&szl;sb&szl;b is fighting!

the Lumberjack Sigun Enb&szl;l&szl;t is fighting!

the Medic F&szl;th Lik&szl;timm&szl;r is sparring.

the Murderdorf Gemblade Rig&szl;th&szl;srer is sparring.

the Clueless Hero D&szl;raigne&szl;n K&szl;sez&szl;h Bed&szl;put&szl; Nebo is fighting!

the Feeder Dod&szl;k T&szl;lot&szl;cat&szl;ten is fighting!

the Mechanic/Animal Trainer R&szl;lf Lik&szl;t&szl;d is fighting!

the Murderdorf Gemblade Rig&szl;th&szl;srer is fighting!

the Minotaur Child R&szl;k&szl; Har&szl;vah&szl;r U&szl;k&szl;onen Lie&szl;u is fighting!

the War Dog Er&szl;sh M&szl;k&szl;d&szl;l is fighting!

the Murderdorf/Hauler At&szl;r Sigunm&szl;zir is sparring.

the Murderdorf/FarmHauler L&szl;tar Amkin&szl;rak&szl;st is sparring.

the The Fisher King Fischer Sting&szl;oden L&szl;l&szl;k&szl;z&szl;d is sparring.

Enter: View report

Last Report Date: 20th Galena, 204

'twas too late to close th' gates, as th' thing was already upon our soldiers. A good thing they 'ad so much armor, otherwise they'd got bitten fer sure. As it was, th' thing ne'er got a bite in 'fore Fischer punched it straight in the mouth wit' 'er gauntlet, sendin' teeth flyin' ev'rywere.

Th' thing fought on fer a while, until she drove 'er spear right thru its heart. At this point th' goblins found their runnin' feet, but it was too late fer 'em an' the filthy scum got slaughtered to the last stinkin' one o' em.

Splint was makin' all sorts o' excuses not to talk wit' the humans, so I told some random dorf near th' depot to buy us some booze an' barrels at least, an' a couple o' spears would do nicely, thank ye.

Tha's it fer th' summer. Now, I gotta ponder on this whole "war leader" thing. Maybe

that shady Mr Frog char'cter can shed some light on what happen'd out there; 'e seems to know more 'bout these things 'n 'e lets out...

MR FROG:

Entry # 3158

More disturbing developments... a horde of goblins came in today. Leading them was a specimen of HS-2, bearing the traditional raiments of a warlord of this iteration's goblin society. It screeched orders to them in what was unmistakably a local goblin dialect. The goblins followed it with the same unquestioning obedience they pay to their own kind.

I believe that this proves conclusively that HS-2, or whatever strain we're dealing with, is in fact capable of high-level social interactions.

I'm scared. Very, very scared. The strain we were testing with did not demonstrate anything remotely-close to this. The strain we were testing with were mindless killers who attacked out of instinct. This strain -- for I am now certain that this is not HS-2, at least not anymore -- has purpose. This strain has the guile to assimilate into a foreign society, fight its way into a position of authority and then stay there. This strain has the cognitive capacity to judge that dodging off of a rigged catwalk is more dangerous than staying on the catwalk itself. These aren't animals we're dealing with; these are calculating beings who have taken it upon themselves to systematically commit genocide upon the entire dwarven species.

I don't know what sort of monster we're dealing with anymore. All I know is that it's far, far worse than what I had anticipated... and that I may be directly responsible for their presence here. What, exactly, was it that I released into this world? Did HS-2 simply somehow evolve? Or was upmanage playing me for a fool from the start? Why, exactly, am I here?

I need a drink. And an escape port. And possibly some way to erase my previous foolish actions.

SPLINT:

15th Hematite, 204. Interim Entry.

Finally ran down that little bugger who didn't have a journal. Said his name was Terrahex and asked me if I knew anything about a particularly mangled freak of nature. I told him to just take his 'new' journal and try not to think about it. Upon looking through it though, I found it belonged to Sergeant Ashsaber the first. I tore out the pages, as evidently that thing still knows he's... himself... Sort of. He can still write anyway. It's mostly death threats and complaining about the lack of emu lately, but still. Someone found it pitched *through* the hatch to his quarantine cell

and just dumped it into the lost and found bin.

Also, Mr Frog's been acting a bit off lately. He's been gathering more moss than normal for his hallucinogens ever since that pink looking abomination to the gods showed up. Keeps muttering about "Upmanage" and the monsters are "different."

On the upside, Sus has been doing a bang up job, and I think I'm finally making headway with my phobia of the cursedmetal. But, if *ANYONE* makes a breastplate artifact from it, I *will* tear it from their hands and beat them to death before I pitch it into the forges to melt. I won't have another demon be born here....

15th Limestone, 204. Interim Entry.

Rolf the gut lassuer and Ashsaber the second passed on sometime this morning. Evidently they died largely due to neglect. I've arranged for funeral services to be held with Sus' permission, as he was in the middle of expanding The Clover when they died. Some other jerk off decided their pet needed to be interred, and while I don't know what it was, I'll piss in their booze at the reception if it wasn't a fighting animal.

Mr Frog's become even more of a nervous wreck than usual since a spawn-led attack force made up of greenskins stopped by to visit. Understandable, since a few dwarves have even asked for some of his various narcotics and such to cope with the sight of the Spawn. He usually replied by smashing a mug in their face and telling them "Fuck off you inbred prick!" before he retreats into his room is the usual response. Or at least that's my interpretation of the mug to the face he gave Draigneane when he asked for some.

I can finally think when I'm around the cursedmetal now. My previous written promise to beat any cursedmetal breastplate producing artifact makers into bloody mush still stands. Perhaps I'll use one of Stova's pitchblende hammers for the task...

(Aseaheru): Mr Frog, what the **CIRCUS** ARE YOU!?!?!?

(Splint): He's clearly an extradimensional/ time traveling researcher in exile with a drug problem. Anyone who's stupid enough to live in Spearbreakers can see it.
[[Talvieno's note: Obviously not true. Few dwarves ever learn Mr Frog's true identity.]]

(Corai): I thought he was a member of Parasol. But that makes more sense.

(Splint): I was being funny. The only thing we can all agree on is it's his fault we have Spawn here and he's working for some strange company, maybe Parasol, maybe not. I honestly haven't a clue.

(Mr Frog): I intentionally left open the question of whether dorf!Mr Frog works for Parasol. I was a bit sketchy about bringing Parasol back officially.

(Splint): Oh yeah, the drug problem is also something we can all agree on. But given the circumstances, it's understandable...
I would imagine he takes some things that really shouldn't be mixed with booze, but he probably doesn't care at this point.

(Mr Frog): I imagine dorf!Mr Frog is basically a walking chemical waste dump at this point. I feel very sorry for any unsuspecting critters who try to jump him. His blood probably does ten kinds of funky shit if it gets on you, *plus* it'll give you cancer.

(Corai): Well I'm just not trying to interfere with anything. But parasol did have time-travel, time-swaps, and the spawn were there "enforcers" as you could say.

(Mr Frog): I left it an open question specifically so you can decide for yourself :p If you have a theory, feel free to post it. I reserve the right to mock it if it's *completely* ridiculous, though :p

(Aseaheru): hey Mr Frog, maybe my guy was brought to this time by you! won't that be fun! someone who hates you AND knows who you are.

(Splint): Look for mentions of a "Joseph."
We've got that base possibly covered. Or dorf!Talvi stole some kind of future dorf Ipad. Or is batshit crazy. or all of the above. [[Talvieno's note: Just in case it was missed, Talvi's imaginary friend, Joseph, was decided to be a person talking on a video call on a futuristic Ipad, later renamed "PEA" (Portable Electronic Assistant).]]

(TerraheX): I was entertaining the idea that Mr Frog's dorf worked for some future government. Can we please step at least a little bit away from Syrupleaf? [[Talvieno's note: Ironically, Syrupleaf would later almost cease to be mentioned.]]

(Splint): And I personally favor the time traveler Mr Frog myself.

(Mr Frog): I'm kind of worrying that my dorf's become a bit of a Marty Stu... Genius pharmacist/bioengineer, time traveller/planesifter (I prefer planesifter; I hate time travel), secret agent, capable of ingesting chemicals in amounts and combinations that would at best leave an ordinary person convulsing on the floor, and he may possibly literally bleed drugs depending on how serious I was with that last comment above ^^^^^. And he may or may not be directly affiliated with a certain corporation which pretty much defined realityhax back in Syrupleaf. Overpowered much? [[Talvieno's note: At the time, nobody really thought so. Later, as the story increased in size exponentially, this one line would be recalled, and dorf!Frog would be thought of as almost overpowered.]]

@TerraheX: Well, it's still possible that upmanage/"Joseph" tricked dorf!Mr Frog and that the creatures he released weren't actually the HS-2 he developed. [[Talvieno's note: This line was an edit, and nobody seemed to notice it at the time, as the thread was moving so quickly.]]

CORAI:

The Detective sat in her jail once more, slain by Titheth the god of treachery, the swine turned on her and slew her, and there 333 legions of Greater Spawn turned on her, she hit the floor in frustration when she remembered something, Parasol had no physical form, she created the spawn, she fueled them, she gave them there power, they would get her out once more. She was right, as Parasol's agents took up picks and struck the Obsidian, they dug into the remains of Syrupleaf, they dug for years until they struck slade. The lifeless rock. As they entered, even hell was not spared, demons were nigh-extinct, and the few that live limped and yelped. They searched

for the detective, and freed her. With there lady with them once more, they decided to try again, this time the spawn-tests will not fail.

"My lady, what shall we do now?"

"Get me a meeting with Armok, I have a idea....."

SUS:

An Interlude

There's no way out. A dead end. How did I even end up in this corridor? I've never seen it 'fore.

The Spawn is bearin' down on me. But this isn't just some crude beast bent on killin' everythin' it sees; this is a thing posses'd of an evil intellect. It knows I'm trapped, an' lets out a snicker, followed by what sounds like Goblinese. In th' dark behind it, I hear its greenskin minions cacklin' gleefully.

IT spreads its chest-maw wide open an' charges. I try to swing my pick but it's som'how stuck in the wall behind me. I raise my left arm in front of me face, knowin' full well it's just two layers o' no-quality bismuth bronze chain between me and certain death or worse.

Som'how, in the nick of time, the pick comes loose. I swing wit' all me might and it strikes true, straight in the mouth o' the ungodly horror. The spawn explodes in a spray of teeth and....

I wake up. In my own bed. A nightmare, tha's all it was.

This overseein' stuff must be more o' a burden than I realiz'd. Ever since I named meself the "Foreman" of the fort, I've hardly had **one** night o' proper sleep. Or a decent drink. Leafin' through me journal entries from the summer, it looks like I've been almost *sober* by th' time the War Leader's band came ambushin' the merchants. I can barely read th' scribble meself. Come to think o' it, I say it's time I head down the pantry an' grab a barrel or two o' that good ol' "fortified brandy" stuff the brewer keeps hidin' away for himself...

SUS:

7th Opal, 204

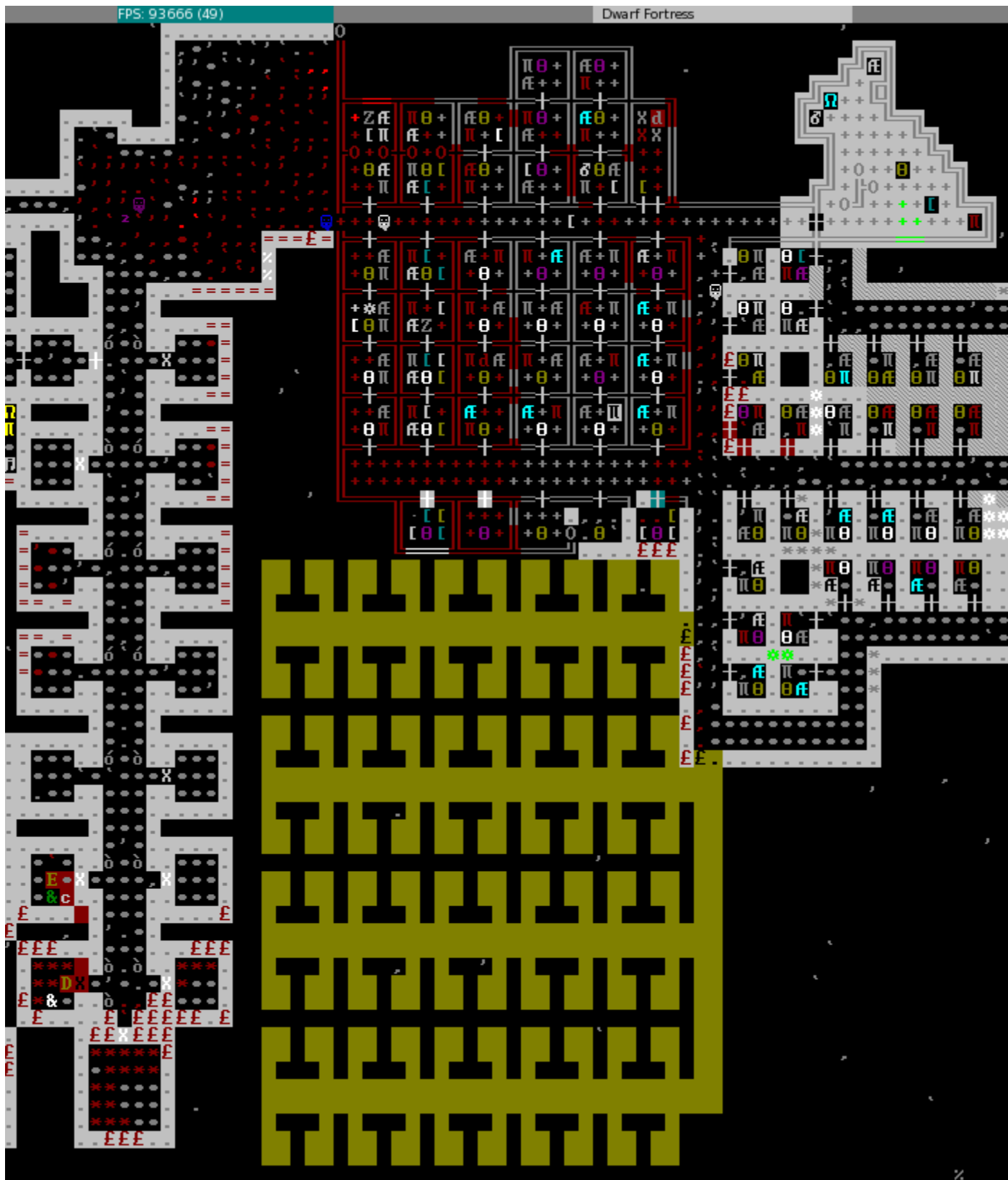
Ah, been feelin' a lot better after I got some proper booze in me system. Also, things seem t' have quieted down for a bit again. The construction of th' archers' tower is coming along right nice, as is the spike trap corridor. Also, I finally found out the matter wit' the outdoors entrance to th' trap corridor: some smart lad had order'd the ramp in thar to be floored over. Now that the spikes are built almost ready an' nearly finished hookin' up to the lever, I've ordered the floor to be torn down. I'd say 'twas almost serene here right now, had I not been nearly ran over by one o' tha

woodsorfs - Lor I think 'is name was. He ran down the corridor shoutin' all about some "great idea" an' having *That Look* in 'is eyes. He settled down in an empty carpenter's shop an' started dragging all kindsa stuff in there.



I also had a talk 'bout the strange "War Leader" Spawn wit' Splint and Mr Frog, who seem to know the most 'bout the accursed things around here. Splint figures the War Leader I saw must've been snatched by goblins as a child an' risen to power as it grew up, 'cause if there's something those things knows how to do, it's killin'. Sounds reasonable but fer one thing: what kind o' goblin would want to steal one of those *...things...*, even as a child? They must be even crazier than I've ever thought. As I told Mr Frog 'bout the Spawn seemin' to speak wit' the goblins, he went awful pale. I don' know what frightens me more, the fact that those beasts seem to be all intelligent an' having some kind of *plan* to wipe out ev'ry last dorf in the world, or his react'n. I later caught a glimpse o' him poking that odd glowing rock o' his and mutterin' something about "Upmanage". Whatever that is, it doesn't sound good. One o' the less known Gods, maybe? If it is, I don' think it's a benevolent one...

Some time after th' incident wit' Lor, another throng o' migrants show'd up. They got quickly assigned to some new jobs. Whew, we're startin' to have quite a lot o' folk here already. Figure I need to be designatin' some new bedrooms. Also noticed our current bedrooms are startin' to get an awful lot o' clutter, so buildin' some coffers an' cabinets is in order.



The military is gettin' in some good training an' gear. Th' dog training program is

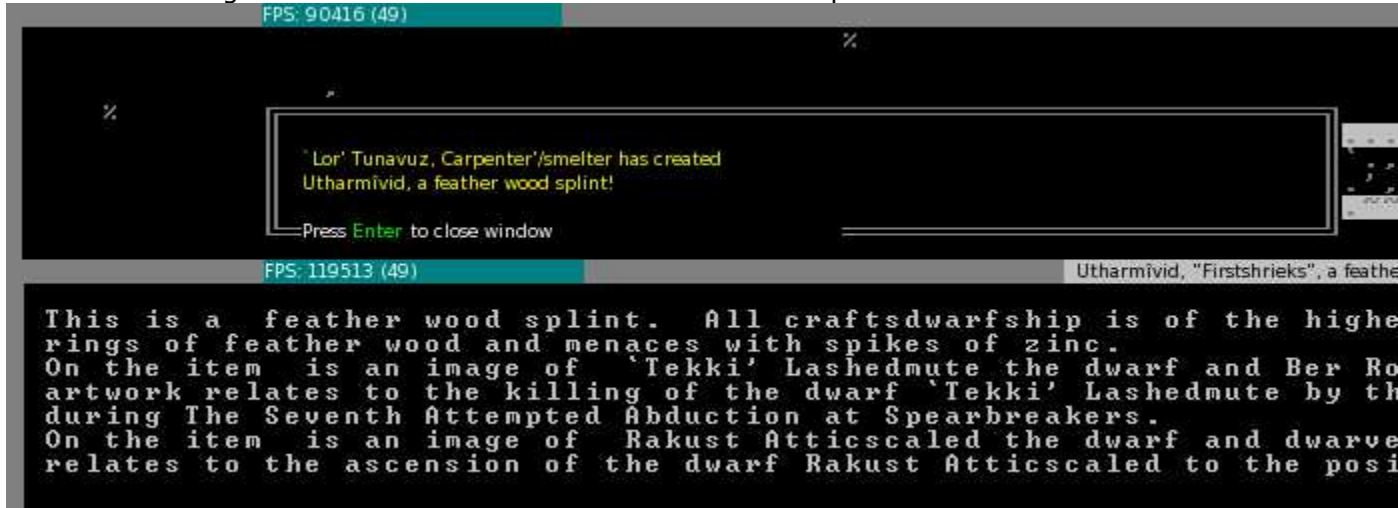
also startin' to pay off, so I got some freshly train'd war dogs assigned. Otherwise, ther's still a lot to do on controllin' the animal populations... Even buildin' two more butcher's shops hasn't sped up the process much.

Did I say it was quiet in 'ere? Somebody must've heard, since down in the caverns, somethin' evil was once again afoot. This time, I hear, it's a huge man made o' flames.

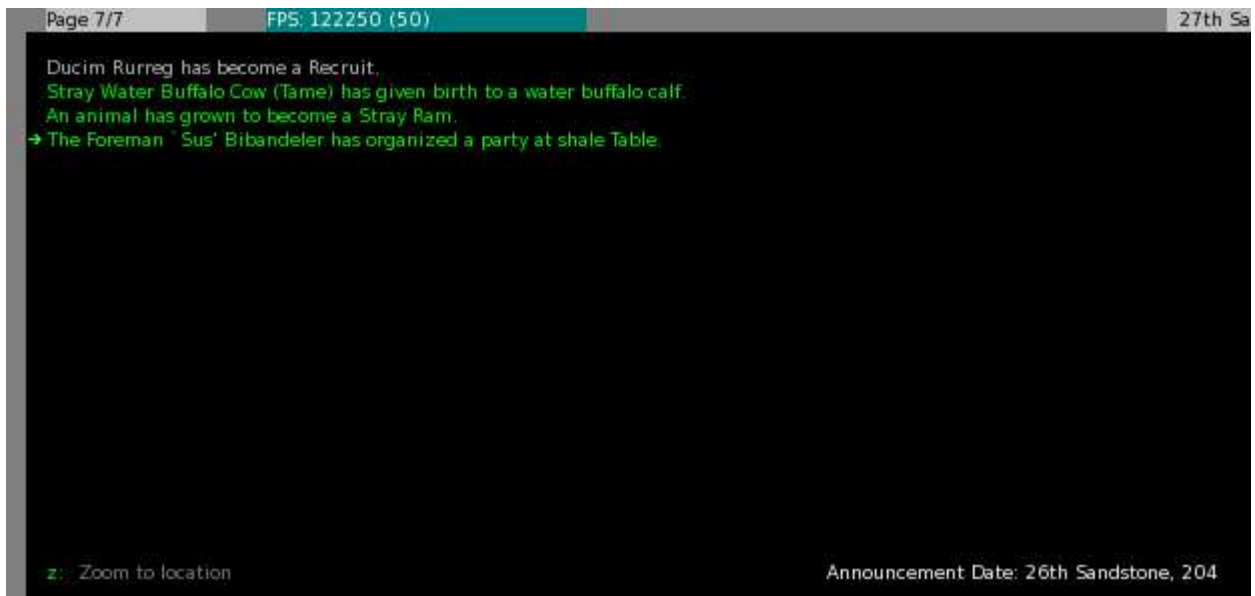


A goblin thief also shows up, stabbin' a plant gatherer in the leg before running off. Urvi is added to th' list of missin' dorfs, only to be found moments later, dead from thirst. Yet 'nother testament to th' legendary "efficiency" of our health care...

Lor finish'd his "great idea". Turns out 'twas a feather wood splint.



Well, since I've been improvin' my own mood wit' generous amounts of brandy lately, I think it's time to share the fun! I'll be throwing a party at this here shale Table, if anyone's feelin' the need for a little pick-me-up! Might even perform me famous Mug Dance...



Whew, some party that was! How I got this *palm bucket* on me head an' all dressed up in nothin' but a +capybara leather thong+ an' («cave spider silk dress»), I may never know... As I was changin' into a bit more appropriate gear, a messenger came in sayin' the caravan was here, along wit' the liaison from tha Mountainhomes. Knowin' that the greenskins love ta pay their nasty visit at the same time as the caravan, I sent our militia squads to th' depot, just in case.

Sure enough, the goblins were up t' their usual tricks: a "trader" near th' border of our lands spotted a three-goblin ambush movin' towards the wagon train. I sent the militias after 'em, while they kept harassin' the poor merchant. At the same time, a pair o' kobold thieves thought they'd grab some easy loot durin' the commotion. Boy, were they mistaken; th' first one got in a bit of a ruff 'n' tumble with the militia an' dodged off the spiked walkway. It ended up several floors down on a stone floor wit' a satisfying *crunch*. The second one was chopped to bits by Gemblade. The militia then set off to chase the greenskins.

'nother disturbing example o' the malicious wit of these things: as the militia was busy chasin' the first ambush, two more sprang out right on top o' the caravan, one of 'em with yet another Spawn soldier. This one seem'd to be just a grunt, though, not a leader. Fortunately, the caravan guards managed ta keep the ambush at bay long enough for our soldiers to come bail them out. One hapless plant gatherer wasn' quite so lucky an' got torn to pieces by the Spawn. After our boys joined the fray, the goblins' resolve broke right quick, an' the spawn was put outta commission. It did get a bite out of a caravan guard's lip before dyin'. I don' have the heart t' tell the poor soldier what's probably comin' to 'im... Even as the wagons were pullin' up to the depot, one final greenskin ambush an' a pair of baby snatchers did show up. They were no match for our season'd militia. I don' think a single one of 'em went back home.

Anyways, tradin' time. We dumped some mangy ol' clothes, a couple o' shiny mugs an' some mechanisms on th' traders fer all the booze an' barrels they could muster. I think we got some spears an' pikes outta the trade as well. Th' traders made a comment or two about the Barbarian blood rain in these parts that had started once again. They also gave a dirty look to th' butcher's shoppes runnin' at full capacity

right near the depot... Traded a bit more though, this time for a bunch o' Plump helmets an' a lot of cheese. Seems there was some kind o' confusion regard'n the position of Mayor yet again, so the Liaison just scoffed an' turned on his heels. Th' merchants left soon after him.

After the tradin' was done, somebody told me Strazxa had apparently starved to death. By the Gods, isn' **anybody** feedin' the bloody patients 'round here?! (Note t' self: must look into some kind o' "designated medic" system in th' near future.)

As I was surveyin' the fort, somethin' odd caught me eye in the caverns: an area of the underground was full o' smoke wit' the cave moss and fungi all smolderin'. Turns out that flame lad down there had been startin' fires everywhere 'e went.



So, tha's about it for Autumn. Now tha' the winter is comin' on, I have a daunting task ahead o' me: I'll need t' sit down wit' Splint an' look over our entire inventory. There's just too many bloody (xlarge troll fur sockx)s, (copper cap)s an' whatnot around here. What we can use we'll keep, but any tattered rags, large an' small clothes an' other worthless crap will be either dump'd in the magma or melted down fer metals. The great cullin' o' animals shall also continue wit' all haste. All in all, I'd say we're doin' pretty good. The second still is producin' impressive amounts o'

booze, there's plenty o' food, the spike corridor is almost ready an' our military seems to kick some pretty serious arse.

[[Talvieno's note: Following this is an image of the stocks screen. The stocks screen is missing. The image relates to the 404'ing of Sus's status image, The 7th of Opal, in the late spring of 2012.]]

ASEAHERU:

Minkot's Thing

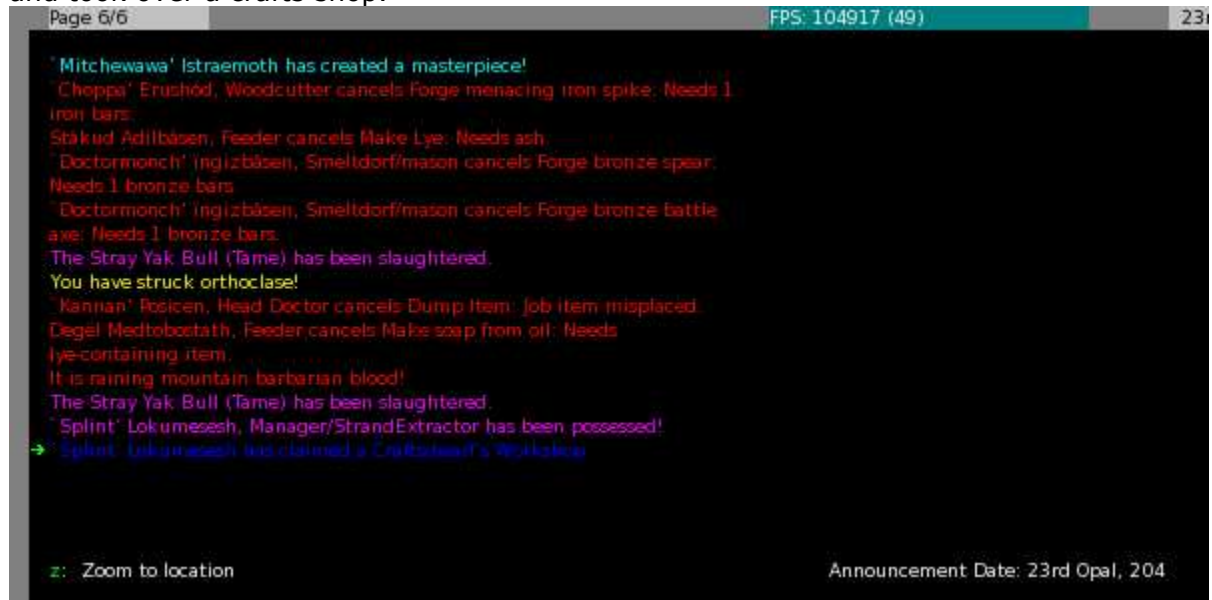
what the flipping heck is this thing? I don't even know where it sprang from but I somehow don't think its a phantom or nothing. crud. it just *had* to pop up today, didn't it? it was going so well to... I got drafted into the army, got my new kit, had my beard trimmed and then whap! this thing pops up! I wonder what it is... it reminds me of something i saw once... *before* I came here when those crazy tall *things* came and took me.... ach, that was so long ago to... you know, its odd. before I was taken I had never heard of a spawn, or holistic, or mountain barbarians. i guess it just goes to show that you never now *what* is going to happen to you.... well, its ether that or whatever is making these people so batshit crazy is affecting me to...

SUS:

1st Granite, 205

(the entry appears to have been completed posthumously by an anonymous contributor)

I was 'bout to ask Splint about th' Spawn again, but 'e got this strange glow in 'is eyes an' started babbling about angry ferns or some such. I decided it best not t' bother him while 'e was in that kinda mood, so I stepped outta 'is way an' he went and took over a crafts shop.



I've been workin' on expanding the graveyard further. It's all dug out, an' more

coffins are added ev'ry day. I hope to Gods it doesn't fill up as quick, too... Oh, an' I've ordered memorial slabs to be built fer some o' the lost souls whose ghosts are sometimes seen wand'rin about.

Th' work on the spiked walkway is nearly complete. There's still a few spikes that need t' be completed and hook'd up to the lever, but tha's no biggie. I also started addin' spikes at the bottom of the dodgin' shafts, just in case. Th' forges are spewin' out new spikes as well as weapons an' armour as fast (or even faster) as th' smelters can supply 'em.

Pretty soon after Splint got taken over by th' strange spirit, 'e walked outta th' craft shop wit' a toy in 'is hand. He says it's worth some 14400 \times an' that he doesn't remember the first thing 'bout making it. "Geniusled the Anger of Ferns", he says its name is. Lookin' pretty fancy, too, tho' I have no idea what anyone woul' do with the thing.



(Entries in Sus' handwriting end here. One final, terse note is added in a different handwriting)

In the late winter of 204, our military sighted a number of corpses rising from their natural rest. Before an investigation could be launched, a massive Spawn ambush sprang out and combat erupted between the undead and Spawn. Overseer Sus was seen stranded outside the fortress, some distance away from the fray. He later tried to enter the fortress through the spiked walkway. Moments later, the outdoors end of the walkway was overrun with zombified body parts and Spawn. Sus was last seen amidst the writhing mass of undead and demonic combatants and is presumed to have died in the ensuing onslaught. We were forced to deploy the spikes soon afterwards to prevent the intruders from entering the fortress.

- The journal ends here. -

(Sus): So yeah, the biggest heap of !!Fun!! fell in my lap at the very end of my year. The necros raised quite a lot of the previous invaders' corpses and got into a truly epic clusterfuck with the Spawn that arrived a moment later.

I closed the main bridge as soon as the Spawn showed up, trying to get anybody still outside indoors via the spikewalk. Turns out my own dorf didn't make it and was stranded outside. I later tried to get him inside, but an animated bodypart from the butchery scared him back onto the spikewalk, where the Spawn were swarming in. He either got torn to shreds or fell from the spikeway, I think. 🙄

Setting the spikes on repeat got most of the Spawn, and the militias got the rest (that we know of). Two necromancers were also killed by the militia, along with most of the zombie body parts. There may be a third necro lurking somewhere. Also, there's still some animated bits and pieces of slaughtered animals around the depot and entrance. In other words, Loud Whispers has some serious mopping up to do.

Oh, and Human Torch is still loose in the caverns.

[[Talvieno's note: At the end of Sus's reign, the spike bridge was still incomplete.]]

SPLINT:

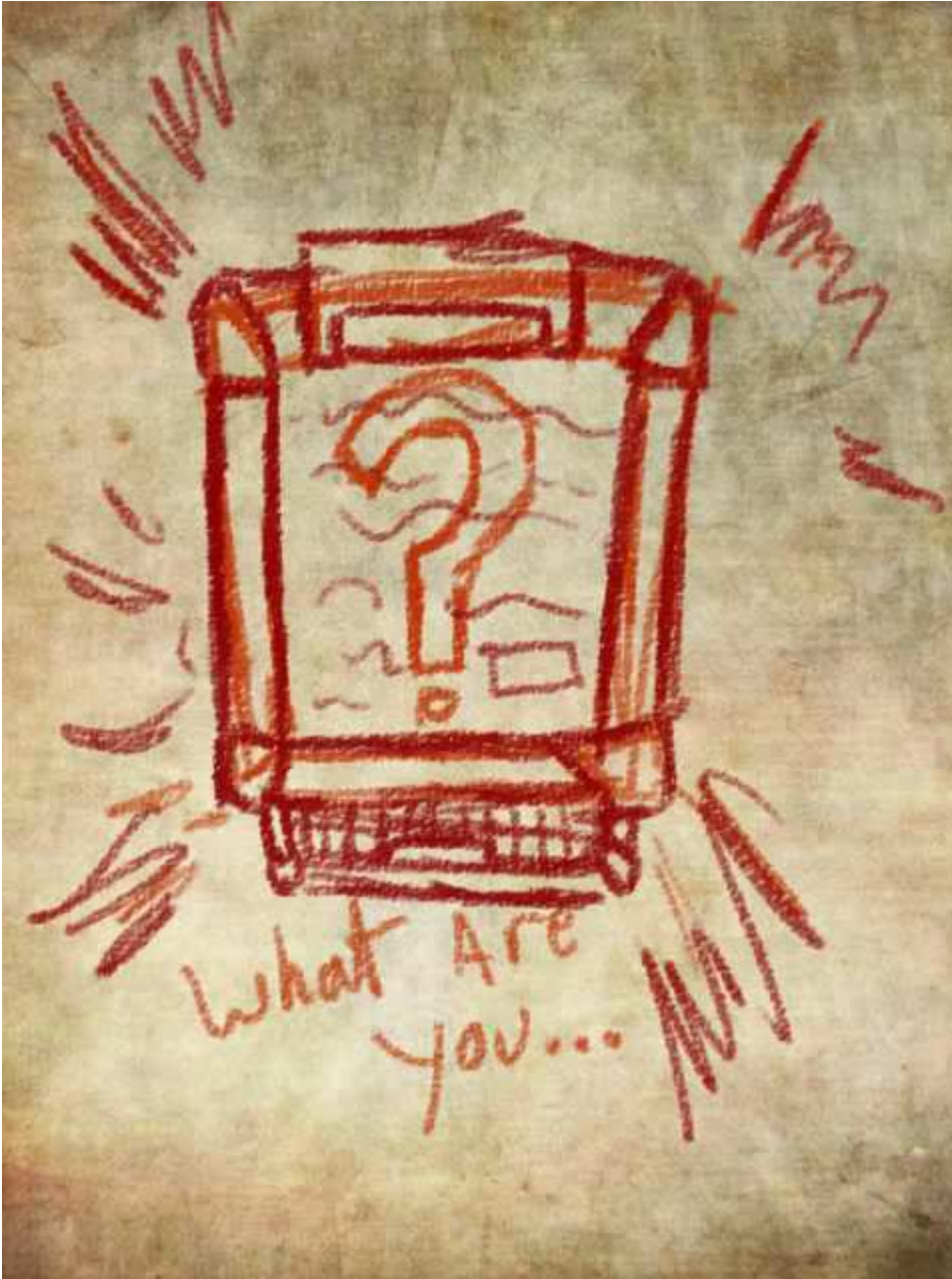
2nd Granite, 205. Interim Entry.

We aren't sure if Sus is still alive or not. I made a note of it in his own journal should any of his relatives or, if he had any, children migrate to the fortress. Why he left it in his room while he went out to either get wood that was left out prior to the attacks or gather some plants I'll never know. I have hopes he's alive out there but none of us have dared to check until we're absolutely positive the undead horde's controllers are gone or all dead.

I also evidently made a very fancy toy. I honestly haven't the slightest idea why I made a toy relating to angry ferns or even that I made it is beyond my power to grasp. I just kinda came to in one of the crafts shops holding the damn thing.... Can ferns even get angry? Bah, I digress. Sus had left a note naming Loud Whispers to be his successor in overseership in case he either died or his term ended while he was out running errands. I'll have to tell him not to assign himself mayorship until after the dwarven caravan and liaison leave so we can get specific orders in for booze and additional metals in case it slips his mind, though why the overseers need to consistently be mayor is beyond me.

I've also got a handle on my little phobia, but I still fear for everyone's very souls. Weapons research is going well, though it will be some time before we can ever produce the equipment to mass produce my little flesh rending toy (Mr Frog says he can do it himself, but Spearbreakers' current state leaves him unable to do so, lacking any source of "titanium," whatever that is, or proper diamonds for the machining tools and lightweight steel rending sawteeth.) For now, Mr Frog has stashed the chainsword as we're calling it in a special bin where he keeps that funny glowing tablet. I keep meaning to ask him what makes it do that, since he carries it around everywhere in place of a proper journal, saying it uses magic to hold his spoken word. I have my doubts though, being one to doubt wizards ever existed, and would like to see how that thing really functions.

The following is an image of a strange glowing tablet in redroot ink. the tablet has a question mark upon it.



[[Talvieno's note: This picture was actually added much later.]]

TALVIENO:

[[Talvieno's note: The following post was also added much later, but taken into the canon as fact.]]

There's Too Many

This is the paper-bound journal of an unknown soldier. It stands out in the room as one of the few items unbloodied by unwashed hands, its clean sheets catching your attention. Though it menaces not with name, rank or date, you soon find yourself lost within its pages.

"There's too many!"

~~~

Spearbreakers, late winter, Sus's reign. The spiked catwalk was seeing its second year of use, and my squad was guarding its entrance to keep the zombies from the caravan that was returning to the mountainhome. I had hardly been training a few months under Feb's command, and we were already in the thick of battle. They said it'd be like this before I signed the contracts, but in all honesty, I believed them not... who would have believed such a story? It sounds like fiction; like some horrific apocalyptic tall tale you'd invent for the campfire, not like real life... not like something you'd have to face on the battlefield, your own life at stake. The plains writhed, seemingly alive with hundreds upon hundreds of corpses that were crawling, staggering towards us, the blood-soaked bodies camouflaging with the ground in an otherworldly manner.

I stood beside my friend and comrade, Uvash, in the middle of the endless plain. "There's too many!" I heard myself crying as I batted away two heads with my pitchblende warhammer. They rolled swiftly back, flicking their jaws against the ground to propel themselves and cackling insanely all the while. How they even drew breath is beyond my comprehension.

"STAND YOUR GROUND!" Fischer yelled, swirling her pike about faster than my eyes could see, corpses flying from around her as though thrown from an explosive blast. Yet, even as I watched from the back of our formation, I could see them slowly closing in on her, inching their circle closer and closer to her feet.

With a heave, I crushed the rolling heads against the ground with a solid swing, the skulls splintering and flinging rotten flesh like splattering tomatoes. Hefting the heavy weapon once more over my shoulder, I ran towards where Fischer was, swinging my hammer back and forth to clear a path.

The blood-red corpses dripped with the recent rain of barbarian innards, dimly visible in the twilight. The sun was setting, and my patrol shift had been over long before, but I'd had no chance to go inside. The necromancers had come in force, raising the masses of bodies shuddering from the ground. We'd struck down every last one of them as they crowded in around us, only to turn and see fields upon endless fields of the dead. With the fiery sky, the sun blocked by red clouds of blood rain, and the living dead below, I couldn't help but wonder if some divine hand had plucked us from the mortal realm and placed us down in Hell.

Fischer went down, corpses piled upon her, clawing and pounding on her adamantite armor. I watched in horror as the upper half of a dwarf dragged its rotting frame forwards with sinewless arms and piled itself on top, weighing her down - yet it was only but one of the thousands that approached.

I crashed my hammer sideways, knocking clumps of undead away from her at a time, only to have them turn and attack me instead.

They crept at me, leapt at me, grabbing at my legs and wrapping their foul-smelling intestines around my arms, pulling me down. Even I screamed in horror as the writhing, twisting masses enveloped me, pulling me towards the ground as if they sought none other lofty goal than to drag me into the earth itself. For a brief moment I lost sight of the sky, completely covered in the dead and unable to breathe, before a miracle happened, both fell and wondrous.

"I'll save ya', laddie!" yelled a man's voice, and I felt the weight fall from my arms amidst the sweet clanging strokes of a sword against old bones. I removed the tangled innards from across the visor of my helm and looked upon my rescuer - it was Sus, the overseer of the fortress. "I cannae let ya go down fightin', laddie!" he cried in his thick accent, his yet-unstained armor glistening in the twilight as the foul breeze blew its stench across my nostrils. His face was half in shadows from his helm, his bushy eyebrows barely visible - I'd never seen him in full raiment until that final day. "Ain't nobody e'er gonna die durin' my term!" he cried with furrowed brow. "Get yerself back up an' let's get e'erybody belowground right quick!"

Encouraged by his heartening cry, I leapt forwards, swinging left and right beside the mighty warriors of the fortress - Feb, Draigean, Fischer - and together we beat a path through the screaming corpse-filled plains back to the tall, blood-streaked stone pillars that marked the entrance to the fortress. A storm was rolling in, and the sky roiled, red and heavy with the blood of the forgotten. It was all I could do to keep pace with the others, but the zombies began to close in upon me, staggering and screeching their eternal hatred of the living, their skeletal hands clutching blindly for my throat. My comrades fell one by one at my side - Dodok, and Uvash, and Stodir - trying desperately to free themselves, until I alone was left, separated from the leaders of our squads. And then, as if all was not bad enough, I heard a sound that chilled me to the bone - far out on the plain, the unmistakable calls of the Spawn of Holistic echoed eerily towards where we stood.

They had come. And we could not even move, trapped as we were between hundreds of uncannily staggering foes that sought to bring us early to our graves. But Sus stood before me like a mighty tower of strength, his sturdy frame standing strong against the crimson tide, and he struck down those that would have us slain. "Jes' in time, boys! C'mon, let's get back under!"

And so we steeled ourselves and charged towards the standing columns as the blood rain began to pour in torrents, soaking us to the skin. Dodok slipped and fell, but I helped him to his feet as Sus held off the hordes, and we continued, stumbling, down the hard stone stairs and into the welcome darkness of the catwalk entrance. It was to our terror that we found that yet more madness awaited us within. Even as we watched, corpses raised themselves from the withdrawn spikes, holes punched clean through their rotting bodies, and began to stagger in our direction as more poured down the stairs from behind.

"Lads, this is it!" Sus cried out, setting his jaw in determination grim. "You four get yerselves down under! I'll hold 'em off, don't ye worry yer head none about me!"

"But Sus!" Uvash protested.

"Nay, laddie!" Sus cried, swinging his sword towards our foes as bones splintered and shattered before him. "I'm overseer, an' I give th' orders, do ye hear?" With a shove he sent us on our way, charging towards the moaning dead on the coagulated bridge.

"FOR SPEARBREAKERS!" the brave dwarf yelled aloud as he, alone, rushed the foes behind us with the intent of holding them off so we could escape. We stormed across the bridge, stopping to fight the zombies that assailed us, careful not to fall into the abysses of immeasurable depth that lay on either side.

I looked behind us once more as we neared the halfway point, catching sight of a flash of blood-red steel among a slurry of bones and putrid flesh just once before it vanished, as the Spawn of Holistic rushed inwards from the surface.

"He saved our lives..." Uvash cried as we ran, dumbfounded in shock. "I didn't even vote for him, and he saved our bloody lives!"



Later Draignean would write it off as Sus's sudden obsession with a pigtail fiber sock that got him killed upon the bridge, but I and my friend Uvash know the truth of the tale. It wasn't Draignean who saved our lives - it was Sus. Sus had stayed behind and held off the wicked undead hordes so that we might escape. "No casualties" was always his motto, and even in his death, with the sacrifice that saved my life, he held true to that philosophy, though it cost him his own. Though he got not a hero's burial, only to be interred among the bridge's mush of dead, he may well have been the greatest hero that I've known.

**(Draignean):** Took a look at the save for kicks and... sweet mother of God.

```
{`Sus' Bibandeler's head}  
{`Sus' Bibandeler's right upper arm}  
{`Sus' Bibandeler's left upper arm}  
{`Sus' Bibandeler's right upper leg}  
{`Sus' Bibandeler's left upper leg}  
{`Sus' Bibandeler's mutilated corpse}
```

Sus is very definitely dead.

The next overseer is going to have a heluva time with damage control.

If you need me I'll be as far away from the hospital as I can get.

**(Mr Frog):** We have some zombie yak hair in our depot. Which can't be killed. Eeps. Would it be poor form to obsidianize it with DFHack?

EDIT:

Nevermind, it... drops dead by itself? 🤔 There's nothing in the combat log...

Also, half our military is on the verge of tantruming for some reason.

**(Sus):** The near-tantruming militia spent a good amount of time in the miasma-filled depot-turned-staging-area. Some tantruming a-hole toppled a butcher's shop in there earlier and spilled the contents on the ground --> hello, perma-miasma. They may also have lost some of their civilian buddies.

This is starting to sound more and more like an unintentional version of "Screw the next player over". 🤪

**(Splint):** That wasn't the intention. But disasters have a nasty habit of showing up at the end of a turn it seems.

**(Corai):** Or as the average DF player say: *Fun*

**(Splint):** The proper term is !!FUN!! Corai, get it right.

**(Corai):** Oh, I use !!FUN!! plenty, but so far, Spearbreakers has exceeded !!FUN!! so I decided to upgrade to *Fun*, it seems creepier, it fits the Detective's children.

**(Mitchewawa):** If losing is fun, Spearbreakers is fucking Disney World.

## SOLPYRE:

Well, its not as nice as I hoped it would be but since Spearbreakers is moving quickly (and I'm not) here's the pic as finished as its going to get.

The Master



**(Aseaheru):** I died, didn't I? I can't find my dwarf in the units list. well, can I be redwarfed as one of the next migrants?

**(Splint):** If you aren't in either missing/dead or citizens you weren't dorf'd to begin with. otherwise, you probably did something we've all done: Looked right at it and didn't even notice it.

**(Draigneane):** Dude, the missing/dead list is 500~ long. Also, speaking as someone who searched through the frikkin' huge list of severed feet and dead yak hair, he is in the missing list.

**(Corai):** I hate you all, I always get peaceful and boring forts. Aside from goblin snatchers I get nothing.

**(Splint):** Yup, Asea, You're dead. I'll stick you on awaiting dorfs.

[[Talvieno's note: This was later proved incorrect. Aseaheru's original dwarf popped back up - something Aseaheru wasn't pleased with. He'd wanted his dwarf to be named differently. For the longest time it was believed that the "Aseaheru" dwarf wasn't the original, but this was eventually figured out. Actually, there were a few occasions where a dwarf was thought to be dead, when he actually wasn't.]]

**(Corai):** I have a feeling that someone in the next few turns will get bored and breach HFS.

**(Mr Frog):** If that happens, then we'll have to use our secret weapon. The denizens of the darkest depths will learn firsthand what true suffering and anguish *is*. Their pleas for a merciful death will not be granted.  
We'll lure them into the Hospital.

**(Sus):** Oh dear Gods no! D:

The straits may be dire, but at least we're still *civilized* (given a broad enough definition of "civilized"). Unleashing the raw chaos and terror that is the "Hospital" of Spearbreakers upon any intelligent being would be the height of atrocity, even by dwarven (merfolk-farming, whale-shooting-barrel-building) standards. Surely even Armok himself would frown upon such an act.

**(Loud Whispers):** I see hospital and chaos in one sentence, this is good.

**SUS:**

A quick- make that a VERY quick sketch of Sus's final moments as a horde of spawn and a horde of undead close in.



I'm afraid I don't have enough time right now to do the scene justice.

## MR FROG:

### **Journal of Mr Frog**

Entry #3172

Sus just wandered into my room while I reviewing notes on the HS-X on my PEA. I wasn't really paying attention, but I think he was asking about the HS-X and goblins or something of that sort.

I \*know\* I locked that damn door. Blasted Paleolithic security technology, could foil it with a pair of tweezers and a pebble. I'll see if I can rig up a magnetic locking device at some point.

[ ... ]

Entry #3179

Sus threw a party in the meeting hall today. I was bored, so I slipped a little something into the punch. In retrospect, should probably have used more discretion. Saw things that cannot be unseen (I never would have suspected \*that\* about Talvieno). Still, I suppose I now have some primo blackmail material should the situation ever require it.

[ ... ]

Entry #3181

A goblin ambush came today, bringing with them an HS-X. Unlike the previous goblin-integrated HS-X, this one appeared to simply be a common soldier, following orders along with the rest. This brings up the possibility that the HS-X are not simply attempting to conquer the goblins and bring them under their control, but are actually simply integrating into their society just as other species the goblins abduct during childhood.

[ ... ]

Entry #3185

Our fabled healthcare system has claimed another victim. If I didn't know any better, I'd swear that our "doctors" are actively trying to cause as many deaths due to neglect as possible. I imagine they have a little scorecard pinned up in the offices somewhere and spend hours upon hours arguing over who gets credit for each kill.

Entry #3186

Apparently, the doctors here don't even \*have\* offices. They just sort of mill around the fortress and go down to the hospital area whenever the mood strikes them, you see. Sounds cushy, if not terribly conducive to proper care of patients.

[ ... ]

Entry # 3194

One of our cavern layers has gone up in flames on account of a Forgotten Beast composed of animate flame wandering around. Fortunately, the surveillance devices I installed are certified to continue functioning indefinitely in temperatures of up to 3000 degrees Celsius. Hopefully we'll be able to capture it and use it as a power supply. Successful thermosupernatural power generation should kick-start this iteration's technology by at least three millenia.

[ ... ]

Entry #3202

necromancers in the fort. Don't know how many or how far in. I think Sus got caught on the spikewalk, not really sure because of all the confusion -- I suppose we'll find out soon enough if he survived.

In the event that they make it into the fort, I may be forced to use my backup strategy. I hope it works It has to work. I don't want to die.

## CODYORR:

Day 1460.

Still I lay here. Those sons of bitches never gave a bother to me. Thank Armok I get refreshing Barbarian blood on a daily basis.

### **(TALVIENO):**

[[Talvieno's note: The discussion in the thread at the time was the controversial idea to intentionally have dwarves bitten by the Spawn, to turn them into Spawn themselves. Dwarves-turned-Spawn keep any armor they're wearing, making them tougher. The plan was to invade hell with our demonic force.]]

Well, I tested the idea. Here are the results:

---

28 Dwarves vs 14 Holistic Spawn

All Dwarves untrained and wearing full adamantine, minus one gauntlet.

All Holistic Spawn unarmed and competent at all skills.

Wielding iron pikes (SPEARBREAKERS PIKES):

93% of Dwarves survive(26)

61% of survivors infected

12% of survivors missing their hand

15% of survivors in critical condition(85% okay)

Estimated 13 potential Spawn

Wielding iron short swords:

89% of Dwarves survive(25)

64% of survivors infected

16% of survivors missing their hand

28% of survivors in critical condition(72% okay)

Estimated 12 potential Spawn

Wielding iron battle axes:

93% of Dwarves survive(26)

50% of survivors infected

19% of survivors missing their hand

23% of survivors in critical condition(77% okay)

Estimated 10 potential Spawn

Wielding iron spears:

86% of Dwarves survive(24)

54% of survivors infected

21% of survivors missing their hand

33% of survivors in critical condition(67% okay)



Estimated 9 potential Spawn

Wielding iron crossbows w/ 50 bolts:

93% of Dwarves survive(26)

46% of survivors infected

19% of survivors missing their hand

42% of survivors in critical condition(58% okay)

Estimated 7 potential Spawn

Wielding iron maces:

82% of Dwarves survive(23)

52% of survivors infected

39% of survivors missing their hand

43% of survivors in critical condition(57% okay)

Estimated 7 potential Spawn

Wielding copper warhammers (meant as stand-in for stone):

89% of Dwarves survive(25)

56% of survivors infected

40% of survivors missing their hand

48% of survivors in critical condition(52% okay)

Estimated 7 potential Spawn

Wielding silver warhammers:

75% of Dwarves survive(21)

57% of survivors infected

52% of survivors missing their hand

67% of survivors in critical condition(33% okay)

Estimated 4 potential Spawn

---

As you can see, an average of about 27% of the dwarves across the tests lose their unarmored hand, despite being fully armored everywhere else. Less than half of the dwarves (just over a quarter on average) are estimated to be useful afterwards - and always less than if you had simply captured the spawn. On the plus side, the dwarves that *do* get converted will be wearing almost full adamantine armor when they turn (unless you force them to remove it (if you can))... Which is a mixed blessing - if one of those got loose in the fortress... Plus, even if they didn't, you're short a whole suit of candy armor.

Honestly, I think simply capturing a spawn siege would be a better idea.

[[Talviono's note: I was the only one who thought this. Everyone else toasted the odds and began making plans.]]

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

**Year 205, the rule of Mitch**

### **Chapter 1: The day I got my honorary overseery badge**

I had been sitting in my mason-shop for some time, busy working on a lovely rock

door. People do not appreciate the difficulty of such a thing, and never seem to notice the intricacy of making a door made of **rock** can lock and unlock. On the inside of the door is a series of mechanisms which lock or unlock the door at the turn of a handle. It's genius, yet subtle. And hard to do, which is why a simple door can take many hours to make.

I had however not been too busy to hear the absolute **riot** that burst from the halls. I had no idea where they're all going. It is the 1st of Granite; the day when the overseer must step down and a new one must be chosen.

Sus's associate (the previous overseer) hobbled over to my shop and simply fainted at my lap, and moaned, "Y' th' new ov'r-seer." in his trademark dumb accent.

"Why?" I asked, trying to lift him off me so I could etch a drawing of a scrotum (personal request by The Master) into the doorhandle.

"Y' seem t' be the onl' pers'n in this stupid fuck'n place that'll be abl' to fix this mess." He slurred into my crotch.

"Oh, what mess?"

He simply passed me my honorary overseery badge and fainted. I did try to eloquently express my feeling about the situation, and I believe I did so with the crass the situation deserved.

**"FUCK."**

I stepped on his face on my way out, to survey the situation. Apparently Sus did not appreciate having her power stripped from her, and made an order for all dwarfs to die in order to annoy the next overseer in as many ways as possible. A brief look through the overseers log, I find a couple of disturbing nuances in our fortress.

- A fucking necromancer **in our trade depot**.
- A goblin hand at the bottom of the dodge-pit strangling some dude.
- A sleuth of undead spread across our fort.
- Our guys are being sent outside; all of them, for many, many reasons. Some are cutting down trees. Some are picking berries. Some are adding a couple of goblin panties to their fetish-collection. In the middle of a necromancer siege.
- Our military is far too unsubstantial to defend our fortress in a proper manner. They're also spread far too thin between groups of zombies, picking up equipment, or in the hospital (which I am surprised to find we actually have).
- Many are depressed.

If chaos were made corporeal, it would be a black slurry that we're currently swimming in, making giant 'snowmen' and 'snow angels' out of chaos-slurry. And so begins Day One...

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

**Year 205, the rule of Mitch**

**Chapter 2: Day One**

"Hello Mitch, it is nice to see you well." called Obok, my close friend, to me.

"SHUT THE FUCK UP OBOK I'M BUSY." I replied.

### 1st Granite:

Okay, first day. Time to avert a disaster...



A necromancer, a bunch of zombies and a ton of corpses. And where are is our great army?

|   |                         |              |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|
| a | The Gloved Pages        | Kill various |
| b | The Universes of Steel  | Kill various |
| c | The Lean Swords         | Kill various |
| d | The Gloved Bells        | Kill various |
| e | The Rooms of Glazing    | Kill various |
| f | The Hatchets of Fording | Kill various |
| g | The Brass Yor           | Kill various |
| h | The Safe Gloves         | Kill various |

They're all over the fucking place. Ugh, I really do not want my rule to be born in fire, but I'll have to make the most of it. First thing is first; bring our guys back in. All surface crap is forbidden, and the mass tree/plant designation is overruled. I will **not** be the one who brought this fortress to its knees on his very first day.

Aha! The necromancer has entered combat with our brave soldiers! It boasts not a weapon, but still has the power to fuck us royally. It has begun to summon the corpses of our fallen **on top of our thin bridge of spikes hovering over a pit of spikes.**



The necromancer was defeated easily by Fisher and Draigneau, truly legends in the field of pikedwarf-ship. No, really, they're legendary. It's marvelous. Also lucky, only one of our guys was pushed off the bridge by a zombie. Now all that remains is 'clean up'. Here's a list of the dead, none of which were my fault of course (casualties of Sus's... sub-standard ability to handle a situation under duress):

*-drawing appears to be scratched out, with addendum at the bottom-*

**TOO MANY TO COUNT, TOO MANY TO DRAW ON ONE PAGE, TOO MANY NOT FOUND. MANY CAN BE SEEN, NOT ALL REPORTED. ASSUME DOZENS.**

There's a hole in our above ground bunker, blocked by some stone some idiot ordered not to be touched.

As far as I can see, there's a lot of levers linking to bridges... and no notes telling me where they link. Still day one and I'm about to give birth to a hate-tumor.

There's miasma all throughout the butchers area and trade depot. I've unforbid **everything** in the trade depot, and ordered the butcher area to be dump-purged. I do not know how much crap to haul out of the depot, and I do not know where or if we have a dumping area.

### **5th Granite:**

There's a tantrumer in our depot area. God help us if we need to rebuild the depot; the amount of hauling to get our crafts out of the way will be staggering, especially considering our zero idlers policy.

I've cancelled all butchering orders. We do not have the capacity to store all the meat, our current butcher's shops are already full of rotten intestines and roasted Spawn tits.

The death-bridge is miasming. Considering I do not know where our air-vent is

(though knowing the inefficiency of our previous rules, we don't have one), I'm going to make one.

### **10th Granite:**

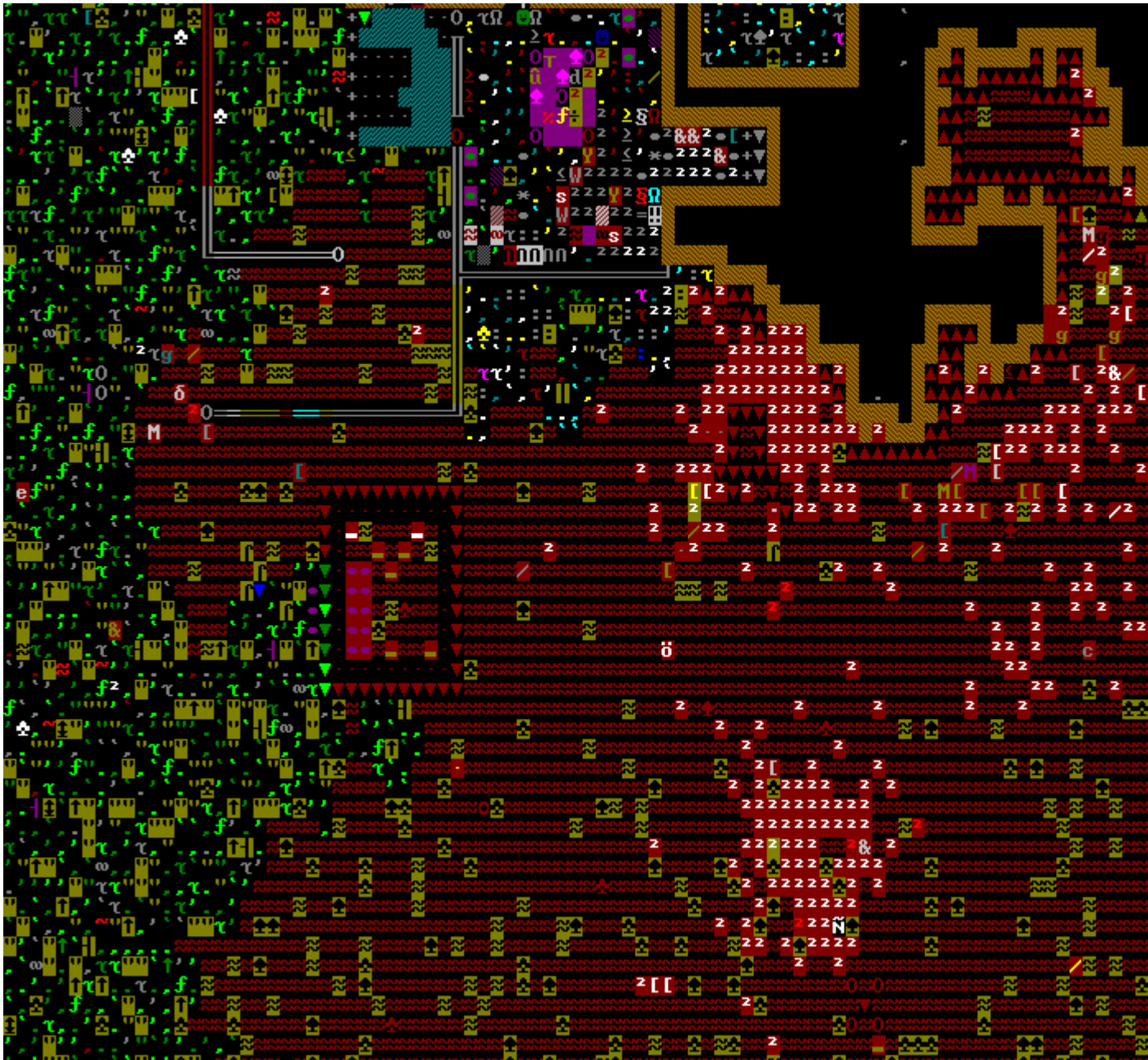
Now I've had the opportunity to really settle into my new job, there has to be a plan. What to plan? Well, our army is quite small. About eight squads of four; still not enough. They're also probably under-equipped. Tomorrow, I'll levy a larger militia to train under our best guards, preferably under the axe. Say what you will about pikes; dashing, heroic, dexterous... and they make the finest monster slayers. However, a horde of axes work equally well against the spawn and even better against goblins.

Also, I will forge new sets of armour; preferably out of iron, steel or adamantite. Our current stocks are probably low, and the armour of our champions appear to be of sub-par quality. All the lower quality armour can be used by the recruits when we have a few spare sets.

Additionally, our crossbow squad is poorly managed. As a crossbow-enthusiast, this cannot stand. The crossbow is a weapon that defines the dwarfs! Mechanical, deadly, cruel, able to be used by even the most unskilled peasant and great en masse. Truly, these are traits that define both crossbows and dwarves. I will, when I have the chance, fill our ranks in the crossbow squad and set up archery training. Forge more crossbows, and amass a stockpile of bolts.

Oh yes, tomorrow will be a better day.

**(Talviero):...**



This image is epic.

**(Splint):** Dear god. The only way that pic could be more epic is if all that blood was from fighting and not Armok juicing barbarians.

**(Corai):** If I'm correct, its battle blood. The evil-biome is on the other side of the map.

**(Talvieno):** @Splint: Yep... You can't see them in the pic, but we have two hands, two ears, and six teeth stuck in trees outside - of goblin, spawn, and dwarven origin..



**(Draigneane):** Nah, it's a mix. Everything to the right side of that wavy partition between the green and the red is in the blood biome. I'm truly interested to see what it would look without the constant barbarian blood though. If I recall correctly, you could use the look function to find blood spatters that had somehow embedded themselves 60+ft up in the sky.

I'm loving this fort so far, I usually play with FD so it's not quite as OH-JESUS-MARY-AND-JOSEPH as it would be otherwise, but this fort certainly keeps you on your toes. At least until our medical staff gets a hold of your toes, then you have to find a different extremity to be on top of.

**(Talvieno):** You're right. Plenty of skyblood all over the place, over all the severed limbs and teeth. It's small wonder it rains blood, really.

**(Mr Frog):** I like how Talvieno's aborted swirly-walls/drop-pit-o'-doom construction has pretty much just become part of the landscape.

"Oh, that 20-metre-deep hole in the ground has always been there. No, the bridge does not work anymore. Now, returning to the topic at hand, to the left you can see our meat-processing facilities, as well as our piles and piles of recently-reslaughtered yak hair."

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 3: Overhaul**

Okay, now that the 'excitement' is over, I can finally start building up the fortress proper. I will start with the obvious depression that's spreading around like a disease; work on a great statuary and memoriam hall shall be my first act. I will also construct fine roads over our dirt and engrave our walls of stone.

#### **16th Granite:**

I've gone over our local job-manager, and asked for an overview of the fortress. A few things disturbed me:

- We're severely underpopulated; previous overseers tell me that 'we couldn't save them'. I believe that they were just too scared to try. At 65 dwarves, most of which are useless, we're not functioning at full capacity. We need to attract more migrants.
- Corai, Weaver, Dariush, Litar and a dozen others are reaching breaking point. See below.
- I also extensively altered our workforce; woe be the idiots who designed this dumb place...
  - Two miners is hardly acceptable, seven peasants have been given mining jobs. Prominent figures include SolPyre, Nomia, No-Hair and Greenback
  - Five people, with no skill in carpentry, have had that job taken from them. One with some skill was given the job.
  - Five people have no skill in masonry, but we need them to build walls and whatnot. One with some skill was also given the job.
  - Two people, with no skill in engraving, have had that job taken from them. Five

with some skill was given the job.

- All nine people with the hunting skill have been, thankfully, released from that awful duty.
- A whopping twenty two people did not have the 'recover wounded' skill. God knows why.
- Two miners have had the furnace operating skill taken off them. They're too busy.
- Eight people, with low skill in weaponsmithing, have had that job taken from them.
- Eight people with no skill in armoursmithing have had the job taken from them. No wonder our armour and arms are of such fucking shit quality.
- Five people with no skill in gem cutting and setting have been given a firm slap in the face.
- Splint, a master-level stone crafter, has been given the job back. Five no-skills have lost their job.
- Everyone except miners have been given the strand extraction job.
- Four no-skill mechanics have been taken off the roster.
- A lot of the fortress did not have the hauling labours. A lot of the fortress has been given the hauling labours.

There were also a lot of fiddling which I won't go too much in-depth to.

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Tulon Sefolotar         |  |
| Vabök Ducimetost        |  |
| <b>Dumed Zaneggākiz</b> |  |
| 'Corai' Oloniteb        |  |
| Nil Likotzalis          |  |
| <b>Vutok Gitnukzon</b>  |  |
| 'Weaver' Ningkidet      |  |
| Ézum Kamuknish          |  |
| 'Dariush' Kúbukisan     |  |
| 'Litar' Amkinrakust     |  |

### 17th Granite:

Fighting on the bridge. A skeleton that remained outside during the necromancer siege just straight up bit that dog's feet off. My word.

Overgrowth of trees in the upper levels is to be trimmed.

Food stockpiles are too small, using old mine-shafts to store food.

```

! Front Caravan Bridge
<0,-2,0>

Red bridge in front of
depot, pull to have enemies
come thru the epike trap
-Mitch

! Spike Trap
<2,1,0>

Keep it on repeat, suspend
when not in use - Mitch

! Front Caravan Bridge
<0,0,0>

Red bridge in front of
depot, pull to have enemies
come thru the epike trap
-Mitch

```

I've tested all of the levers, and clearly marked their uses. Gods bless my foresight.

```

Construct rock Throne
Construct rock Hatch Cover
Construct rock Armor Stand
Construct rock Weapon Rack
Construct Bed
Construct rock Coffin
Construct rock Grate
Construct gold Statue
Construct rock Slab
Construct wooden Crutch
Construct wooden Splint

```

Surplus of many things ordered, not shown are rock tables and traction benches. This will keep our masons busy for a while.

## 26th Granite:

Migrants! Among them an expert marksdwarf, a skilled blacksmith, a miner, a competent marksdwarf, two expert gem cutters, a high-master wound-dresser/diagnostician, a high-master wound-dresser/suturer, a weaponsmith, a high-master armoursmith(!) and 20-something useless layabouts. Glorious day indeed!

Kannan (a no-skill doctor) has been replaced from the head-doctor by Cog, the high-master diagnostician. Some are protesting our out-sources labour, but they'll stop when they're properly taken care of.

Splint, the skilled appraiser, has been replaces as broker of Spearbreakers by Simon Tam, the adept appraiser and current mayor. Splint is far too busy being the manager and bookkeeper to handle that affair anyway.

Simon Tam and Weaver, the mayor/broker and hammerer/captain of the guard have finally met with me to complain about their lack of... anything. The other overseers should have handles this, but I can't say I'm surprised they have not. I'm beginning to think that they were all either lazy, inept, corrupt, or all three.

### 8th Slate:

Found no less than **three** holes to the caverns. **Ugh.** We're also far too busy to patch them up any time soon.

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 4: Picking up speed**

Knowing full well the sheer *unkillability* of the Spawn, a fully functioning military is paramount to survival of this fortress; and for every fortress that withstands the Spawn onslaught there's another bastion for dwarves and a wall for Spawn, and as each fortress falls we draw closer to being the last stand of dwarf-kind. And if others can survive, so can we.

### 9th Slate:

The military needs an overhaul; we're too few in number, under-equipped and under-trained. Considering Corai's severe depression, and the fact that he has no skill in pikedwarfship, he has been withdrawn from the military. However, there will be a wave of conscripts added to each squad (so far eight squads) to bring each squad up to five dwarfs. This will keep the logistics running smoothly with training whilst also reducing confusion between military tacticians in regard to which squad does what. Additionally, I am forging 20 sets of iron armour; this is to fill in the missing pieces of armour some of our guys have. If we train our low-level armourers, they will be able to suit us up quite nicely when we can get sets of adamantine running.

Okay, so here's what I can gather from our squads:

- The Brass Yor, lead by Weaver, is a hammerdwarf squad with 2 novices and 1 adequate . None of them have breastplates, one is missing greaves and boots.
- The Gloved Pages, lead by Fischer and Draigean, is a pikedwarf squad with 2 legends and 1 no-skill. Fully equipped with adamantine and steel but the quality is low.
- The Universities of Steel, lead by Gemblade, is an axe squad with 1 proficient and 4 novices. Well equipped in iron.
- The Lean Swords, lead by Fb, is a hammerdwarf squad with 1 expert and 4 novices. Equipped with iron with a few pieces missing. Not all have breastplates.
- The Gloved Bells, lead by The Master II, is a pikedwarf squad with 1 adequate and 3 novices. Low quality iron armour with a few pieces missing and no breastplates. Requisitioning additional breastplates.
- The Rooms of Glazing, lead by Wyzn, axes, 4 adequate 1 novices, low quality iron and missing a few parts. No breastplates.
- Hatches of Fording, hammers, 1 proficient 2 novices, low quality iron with missing parts and no breastplates.
- The Safe Gloves, 1 expert, 2 competents and 2 novices. Not enough bolts, not

enough pieces of armour.

I've levied a list of dwarves, based on their current happiness, to fill in spots. I've ignored those with useful professions.

Zinkydink  
Greenback  
Codyorr

Our stocks of metal are dangerously low, however. Probably due to the fact that we're under-populated. This might take a long time to get running properly...

### 12th Slate:

Turns out our high-master armoursmith died before my reign, and has risen from the dead... it seems like we'd be a lot better off if people would actually protect their constituents, but I guess this is what happens when you elect overseers via 'First in, best dressed'.

Our head doctor and high-master diagnostician has started calling himself 'NCommander'. Keeps saying he likes to fix people, which is more than what I can say for a lot of people here.

Wynz, recently injured, is eerily close to dying of de-hydration. **No one has brought him water.** And do you know what his injury is?

**Her right foot is dented.**

No really, that's it. I can't tell who I'm more shocked at; the idiot for starving himself over a stubbed toe or the idiots who are letting him. I'm going to dig a well in the caverns so people can bring the injured some fucking water.

We need more rope. We have plenty of cloth.

Moods are uplifting as the fortress bustles with activity. We still have no idlers still, which is a bad thing, meaning we're tasked beyond capacity.

**It has started raining.  
It is raining mountain barbarian blood!**

It began to rain; normal rain. It washed away the blood, but it will be back again. Some children went out and played in the rain but it rained blood shortly after and they came back in, crying.

### 10th Felsite:

Wynz has died, and there are others who will shortly follow. Will someone please **give them water?!**

**(Sus):** Well, it's good to know our fine doctors are up to their usual efficiency. I wonder if removing the hospital entirely wouldn't actually *improve* survival rates? 🤔

**(Splint):** I've seen forts with occasional neglect killing wounded. I don't think I've seen a succession fort where the leading cause of death was the medical staff.

**(Mitchewawa):** I'll be playing when I get home, any one have any requests? Beyond dwarfing Reudh, working on new sets of armor, working on new industry and overhauling the health care system there isn't much I need to fix or do, so I'm open to suggestions.

**(Sus):** Yeah, good luck on that. 🤔

**(Mitchewawa):** Hey, it's attitudes like that which cause this to happen 🤔

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 5: All Hail Mitch's Social Reforms!**

Okay, following Wynn's tragic yet totally avoidable death, and the imminent deaths of a few of our other soldiers, I am issuing a state of emergency. My rule, in a mere two months, has had a significant impact on the fortress. Many are finding jobs beyond simple hauling with my clutter-purge (no longer will we be wasting valuable time hauling crummy copper weapons perpetually), and those jobs are being better preformed with my job-overhaul. The military is a bit better fleshed out, and future enhancements will be adequately equipped (would be better if Sus didn't kill our awesome armour-smith).

Dissenters, heretics, nay-sayers and traditionalists dismiss and protest my 'radical' reforms, citing them as 'ruinous', 'time-wasting', 'over-ambitious' and 'grounded in fantasy'. Detractors must be silenced, lest they become a problem to the Great Plan. And what is the best way to win over naive traditionalists AND the masses? Why, saving our fighting men and women, of course. I will do what they say is impossible; I will overhaul the medical system. A foul, almost non-existent practice that people are calling 'beyond saving'. If this works, they will trust in my Great Plan, yes...

#### **12th Felsite:**

Okay, after some searching I have found the 'hospital' (it feels like lying calling it that). It is so un-managed it almost seems like the previous overseers were just trying to jury-rig the perfect killing field. I've made a list of quips to fix:

- We have no dedicated doctors. Those with the skill are often far too busy eating an acre of cocks or something to save the needy. Should four dedicated doctors be enough?
- We seem to lack any altruistic dwarves, the kind that go out of their way to help people. Pure bad luck, or a habit that Spearbreakers breeds? 

|             |    |                                           |
|-------------|----|-------------------------------------------|
| Helpfulness | 38 | Does not go out of own way to help others |
|-------------|----|-------------------------------------------|
- Our hospital is a fucking mess. There are cabinets (for what reason?), there's crap everywhere (**Wynn hasn't even been carried off**), the beds are separated from



the surgical tables which are separated from the traction benches. Dying dwarves have to be carried dozens of paces to and from their beds, tables and benches, it is ridiculous.

- There's no water nearby, for whatever reason. Maybe the doctors like walking down 40 floors and drag heavy buckets of silty, contaminated water back to the patients (or not, as is the case).

- There isn't enough of a lot. There is literally zero thread (some previous overseer spun it all into spools of useless, cunt-shitting cloth), there is 5 tables and 7 benches to our 14 beds (it is supposed to be 1:1:1, all of which are one pace away from each other), and there is hardly any crutches or splints.



We simply do not have the man-power to haul all the clothes and trinkets of the deceased out, but an order to re-arrange the hospital will be completed in relatively short order. I had already began working on spare traction benches when I set up all of the work orders, but it had to be cancelled because **no one made spare rope**. So I'll have to make do with what I have. Commence re-furnishing!

#### 14th Felsite:

Elves have arrived, and with them **tons of thread and medical supplies**. I'm happy to see elves! I can't believe it!

To counter-balance that spike of ecstatic, here's a drawing of Wari looting Wynz's corpse instead of feeding the patients



Oh, and I've found some particular laziness on the part of whoever made the iron

spike traps, that were ever-so-lovingly originally thought up by me.

```
Upright -menacing iron spike
Waiting for construction...
Needs No Special Profession
Construction suspended.

Retracted Spears/Spikes
menacing iron spike [B]
menacing iron spike [B]
<silver spear> [B]
<copper spear> [B]
+iron spear+ [B]
≡shale mechanisms≡ [B]
```

Half-assed our defence, but oh well.

I guess Simon Tam has to go trade with those pricks, but he's complaining about how he 'can't find those cuntin' mugs in the trade screen'. I told him to stop bitching.

### 15th Felsite:

Sweet Armok we're running out of mugs.

```
shale mugs [356]
gneiss mugs [89]
gypsum mug
jet mugs [31]
pitchblende mugs [3]
kaolinite mugs [3]
microcline mugs [11]
mica mugs [35]
```

I know it doesn't *look* like it, but that is incredibly low by Spearbreakers standards.

### 16th Felsite:



A Spawn Master Thief! ***In our base.*** Luckily, it happened to find Fischer, our friendly neighbourhood legendary pikedwarf. Luckily, it turns tail and flees... whereupon Fischer runs him down and slashes its **spine** until all the pieces re-arrange like a damn jigsaw puzzle. Also, there was a war black bear involved; don't ask.

## SPLINT:

### 11th Felsite, 205. Interim Entry.

Since Mitch picked up the mantle after Sus' untimely death (Col. Fischer, who has become uppity about not being referred to by rank, said she had to kill his severed head) things have been showing marked improvement. While I'd rather be in my little dirt-rooms with my various census, stockpile, and other accounting logs and ledgers, Mitch said I should put my crafting skills to good use since I currently have little to do since I recently updated the records and there's no merchants at the moment. Been plying my once-stopgap trade for the last couple months since. So much shit hit the windmill when Sus was killed and Mitch took over it was ridiculous. It was so bad, in fact, reports on the clusterfuck in the trade tunnels, spikewalk, and surface resulted in things the Army already wasted ending up listed on the kill counts and such multiple times, and I've since lost the papers amidst my many uncleaned mugs and books and so can't correct them. Corai was also taken out of service, due to him allegedly lacking skills. Clearly he simply hadn't finished learning the basics of soldiering and self-defense maneuver and hadn't gotten to weapons training yet. That crap takes time! And if our original few warriors could deal with it, he should be able to put up with it too. We're here to build a full-time professional army after all.

It seems I actually have fewer mugs than normal on hand.... Odd. I've become so used to the things when we run low it actually kinda feels empty in the stockrooms and cabinets... Maybe I'll make a few hundred more until I get put back on bookkeeping duty... I've grown attached to the stupid... Why is there a pitchblende mug in.... Who the fuck is using hammerstones for mugs!? If I catch somebody using the pitchblende we *do* have for trivial things, I will beat them within an inch of their miserable lives! I made it abundantly clear that that was to be used for hammers only! If I find out who made them..... Now, now, Splint, calm yourself, keep writing, don't flip shit....

Also, HARD's cousin Wynz went to join both HARD and the war god in his ale hall earlier today. Mr Frog made a snarky remark saying something to the effect of "If I ever get wounded, remind me to stay well away from that lovely hospital we have." Can't say I blame his distrust for the medical staff. I've seen neglect kill a soldier here and there in my time, but it's at the point where our *hospital* is killing more of our fighting men and women than even the she-demon's spawn! Mitch said he aims to rectify this, so I do have faith. I do admit ashamedly journal, that I don't go down to the hospital to visit the wounded, largely because I'm afraid I'll catch something. After all, that place can't be in a hygienic state if the doctors can't even be bothered with bring water for the wounded down or... up.. I guess, to them.

I'm going to try and arrange a funeral for Wynz, Sus and a few others, with full military honors. They deserve that much, but gods, this is place is a terrible mess as it stands... I don't know if we can even arrange a proper funeral for anyone right now. We may need to wait until everything is sorted for the proper ceremony and just try to stuff their remains in a coffin quick as we can for now...

I've piddled about with you too long today journal, I must be off to the crafts shops. These stupid things won't make themselves...

## SPLINT:

*Two dwarves sit in a decaying old barracks in a long disused section of the capital. The tables and chairs collect dust, mugs and the occasional bronze helmet scattered upon the tabletops. "Guess we're it." The Master said to the dwarf across from him. His voice was heavy with sadness, as it was clear they were the only ones from their old company left alive. "Aye, it looks that way. What happened to Urist?" Draigneane said. He hadn't heard from most of the company, though he knew how all but a few had died. "Cave-in month and a half ago. Him and some other poor bastard when that glass monstrosity was rampaging through the farms knocked out a support." The Master replied. He'd been one of several pikedwarves to fight that beast. One of the few to survive. "And Obok? Sarvesh?" Draigneane asked quickly, hoping they had simply moved to another settlement. "Obok died on a hunting trip, Sarvesh lost his mind over an artifact." There was silence. The two looked at the booze they had poured themselves in their mugs. "To the 88th's fallen!" Draigneane said, raising his mug to The Master, who clinked his to it with a "To the 88th..."*

*They downed their drinks and looked around. So quiet. It used to be packed with members of the 88th Pike Company this time of year. But the last few years have seen all but two killed in various accidents, projects, or claimed by madness. "So, Splint said he was founding a fortress by monarchal order out east." Draigneane said. "I know, he asked us to go and we turned him down." The Master said, tossing his mug at a rotting wooden bin. "Well, it's not like there's a lot here to miss. We'd have to leave our gear of course-" The master held a hand up. "Way ahead of you my friend. I thought about it and told him we'd come in a few months." "Hardly fair to speak for me. But I do have a quick question." Draigneane said, holding up a heft bag of calendars. "What?" "Can I bring my Word of the Day calendars?"*

## MITCHEWAWA:

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 6: Holy Shit**



Uh-fucking-oh. My first real Spawn combat situation; and with half the squad selecting new pieces of armour, four in the hospital, and Fischer on the surface chasing down a Spawn Master Thief right into the ambush. Luckily, my suggested trap was actually installed, though not finished (just in case they get in).

Here's how it works; Spawn are fast and strong, and standard weapon traps are usually just stepped over or broken by the more intelligent Spawn. My idea was this;

the Spawn charge through a narrow hallway, and a lever is pulled. Gears shift, and per square meter of floor rise ten iron spikes, menacing, jagged and stuck to by bits of gore. Surely a Spawn couldn't even dodge a veritable wave of sharpened iron, and would either jump to its death or be impaled.

There is, of course, one flaw in my plan. No one can pull the stupid lever. Why? Because we're so under-populated from all the racist immigrant genocide previous overseers allowed, there isn't a single person watching it. I decided to remedy the situation by assigning a peasant to watch the lever 24/7.

And the matter at hand; Fischer is caught alone, against seven Spawn This will end... badly. Rally the troops?

### 16th Felsite:

Fischer leads the Spawn away from the fortress, he seems to be running away. Strange. Also, I can conform that Spawn are immune to black mamba bites, as the Master Thief Spawn is not keeling over and dying from the sloth bear/black mamba attack.



A second ambush! Man the lever, guy!

The Holistic Spawn Wrestler misses The The Fisher King!  
The Holistic Spawn Wrestler strikes at The The Fisher King but the sh  
is blocked!  
The Holistic Spawn Wrestler attacks The The Fisher King but She jumps  
away!  
The Holistic Spawn Wrestler attacks The The Fisher King but She jumps  
away!  
The Holistic Spawn Wrestler attacks The The Fisher King but She jumps  
away!  
→The Holistic Spawn Wrestler attacks The The Fisher King but She jumps  
away!

Fischer is caught and is fighting a losing battle, not hit yet thankfully.

Draigneau has exited my makeshift backdoor (hadn't yet floored it over, it was the garbage dump), to fight the Spawn Master Thief that was caught earlier. Fischer is still caught in a clusterfuck of jaws on legs. He might not make it. Meanwhile, the spikes tear a few of the Spawn various new holes, yet despite getting a spear to the **head**, they're not going down.



with her <steel pike> and the severed part sails off in an arc!  
 The The Fisher King bites The Holistic Spawn Wrestler in the left foot  
 tearing the muscle and bruising the bone!  
 The The Fisher King latches on firmly!  
 The Holistic Spawn Wrestler misses The The Fisher King!  
 The The Fisher King shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the  
 foot, tearing apart the left foot's muscle and bruising the bone!  
 A ligament in the left foot has been torn and a tendon has been torn!  
 The The Fisher King shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the  
 foot, tearing apart the left foot's muscle and bruising the bone!  
 A ligament in the left foot has been torn and a tendon has been torn!  
 The The Fisher King stabs The Holistic Spawn Wrestler in the head wit  
 her <steel pike>, tearing the muscle, shattering the skull and tearin  
 the brain!  
 A tendon in the skull has been torn!  
 The <steel pike> has lodged firmly in the wound!  
 The The Fisher King twists the embedded <steel pike> around in The  
 Holistic Spawn Wrestler's head!  
 The The Fisher King scratches The Holistic Spawn Wrestler in the head  
 tearing the muscle, shattering the skull and bruising the brain!

Fischer entered a martial trance, and became a blur of dwarven fury; a losing battle of dodging turned into a tornado of strikes, bites and kicks. It would be more effective if we gave him a proper quality adamantine pike instead of a low-quality steel one. Draig is closing in on the battle! We might have a chance to save them!



Fischer has lapsed back into his dodge-dance, and a few prepared dwarves have left the hole to assist. They're too far behind. Three Spawn remain at Fischer whilst two Spawn distracts Draigneau.

The Clueless Hero bites The Holistic Spawn Wrestler in the lower body  
 tearing the muscle and bruising the guts!  
 The Clueless Hero latches on firmly!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's skin and bruising the fat!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's fat!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's skin and the fat!  
 The Holistic Spawn Wrestler struggles in vain against the grip of The  
 Clueless Hero's upper front teeth on The Holistic Spawn Wrestler's lo  
 body.  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's skin and the fat!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's fat!  
 The Holistic Spawn Wrestler misses The Clueless Hero!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's skin and the fat!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's fat!  
 The Holistic Spawn Wrestler misses The Clueless Hero!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's fat!  
 The Clueless Hero shakes The Holistic Spawn Wrestler around by the lo  
 body, tearing apart the lower body's fat!



This is... poetic justice.



And the reinforcements are here! They quickly take down the two Spawn blocking Draig, whilst Fischer... kills all three Spawn on his own. This is incredible! Fischer just got into a fight with seven, fought for two days straight, killed five, and came out with only a few bruises! If this is not an Armok-sent miracle, I have no idea what is. A hero's celebration is in order, right after Simon Tam deals with those pesky elves who probably brought them here.

### **18th Felsite:**

This isn't just a victory for Spearbreakers, but me as well. The nobles and higher-ups have been congratulating me on my military victory, and people are starting to ease into my way of thinking. Soon, my rooms for the nobles will be complete and then no one will resist my rule, and my Great Plan will be enacted.

In other, miscellaneous news, bought all the animals, ropes and booze I could from the elves. Gave Draigneau's extravagant housing to the hammerer, made a room fit for a baron, started installing additional spikes. It's a good day!

---

You will not believe how close Fischer came to dying. At one point he got knocked into a pool and started to drown. [[Talvieno's note: The gender joke continues.]]

### **CORAI:**

I was bored, so have a SoH picture!



Beware the cuddliness.....

## TALVIENO:

### **From the Third Journal of Talvi Diamondknight**

*This is an emu leather journal. All crafts dwarfship is crude at best. The pages smell of some strange, exotic poison. The name "Talvi Diamondknight" is etched onto the front beside an image of a cavy in emu leather. This item menaces with nibbled pages.*

### **Unknown date**

I'm havin' to write in a new journal now, cuz the first one got filled up, and then I

ate the one after that... so this is my third journal, but its only the second one that I can read now, cuz there ain't no second one no mores.

The past year was the roughest ever. Everthing went wrong, an' all at once, too. It started when Mr Frog an' Splint were up in 'is office together... He weren't *never* lettin' me in there anymores... But then it got worse... One mornin' I woke up, and there weren't one single lil' cavy left in the whole fortress. I cried... I cried and went lookin' for 'em everywhere... I wanted to put up engravin's of the lil' cavies, but there weren't no clear spots of wall that SolPyre said I could engrave on... Plus, he don't think much of my drawin' skills anyhow...

I finally found one lil' cavy... But someone else said it was theirs, and I couldn't have it. I ran back to my cavy room an' cried m'self to sleep... It was like th' whole world had ended and such, all at once... I didn'... oh, gods, I didn even get a chance to say goodbye!

So there I stayed, for well-on nigh half a year, doing nothin'. I said I was on break... but really it was my heart was broke more'n my job. It's like... it's like I had children - dwarf children, not cavy children - I always thought of 'em as my babies... Well, 'cept for Tobias, of course. He was the fat one who was always unner my bed... He *a*lways stayed there, and when I remembered him I crawled under the bed to look for 'im... But he weren't there. I took up the socks he'd nibbled unner there, held 'em close to my heart and cried, layin' where he'd always laid. Joseph tried to comfort me, an for the first time in a while I let 'im. I was so sad an' all... I laid there for well-on nigh a month.

Mr Frog'd come an visit me ever' now and again, and so'd good ol' Mr. Splint. He cares 'bout me too, but not like I did for Mr Frog. Bombzero always took me food an' water and such... Sus - the new mayor, real nice man, he was, an' smarter'n he thought, too - said I didn' have to work none until I felt better. Him an' Draigneane did a lot of changin' with job rules - and speakin of Draigneane, he brought me a calendar journal since my old one was filled, an' I started writin' in it to pass the time - it was so nice - there were numbers on every page, and I could fill a page every day an' never get lost on what day it was. I was startin' to get happy again.

*The words on the following page are smudged with teardrops.*

Then one bad, sad day when Miss Bombzero brought me my supper like she always did, I asked what it was... she looked away and didn' wanna say, and I guessed it - I was eatin' my cavies. I threw up - weren't fun - I was eatin' my kids! I was jus a cavy too, after all.. I ain't never gonna forgive m'self for it, no, never. I dunno who said they oughter be turned t' food, but now I jus' wish I'd went and tole Splint straight out that they were mine, an' nobody should eat 'em. There weren't even that much meat on 'em all!! ...well, 'cept for Tobias, but sometimes I thought he was half hippo. I ain't never seen a hippo, tho' - I jus' know they're s'posed to be big. Like elephants, who carry their tusks around and push things over with 'em, and fight with 'em like maces. I'd love for an elephant to give me one of his tusks one day, I would... but I'd rather have m' cavies back... I'm gonna miss lil' Georgie boy an' Elana... so bad... and... they'd just got married, too - Georgie boy'd finally got up the courage to ask her out! And then they got ate... jus' like that.

But that's why my second journal ain't around no more. I wouldn' eat meat, cause I

thoughts it might e'en be cavy meat still and such... So I would eat pages. It was a calendar journal... There weren't as much meat on it as a real calendar, but still. Mr Frog knew it'd been me eatin' the calendar pages - I dunno how he knew, but he's a real nice dwarf, he didn't tell nobody. But he did spray stuff on my old journal t' try to keep me from eatin' it... Well, it didn't work - I still ate it - but I felt real sick for well o'er three months til it went aways.

### **Unknown Date**

I didn't get a chance to finish m' last entry - Sus came in to talk. He'd always been talkin' to me - got me my new journal, too. He put a lil' picshur of a cavy on the front, too, bless him... Such a sweet man - he reminds me so much of my older brother back home, he does... or did... Anyhow, he'd come in every now'n then to say hello an' sit for a spell, talkin' bout how he was mayor and stuff that was happenin'. Splint got possessed by some old ancestor spirit and made a lil' toy hammer... He hated it, tho - said it needed to have a mug on it with spikes. He started havin' Solpyre draw up designs for a mughammer - a giant weapon of sorts with a pole attached to th' handle of a giant mug... I ain't much'f one fer weapons, I ain't, but it sounds nice... A weapon you can drink wine out of, iffn you wish.

Anyhow, Sus got caught in an ambush... They wouldn't let me see him when he died - they said he'd changed... I missed him so much, gods... Mitchewawa is the new mayor, and he don't never come t' visit me. He's always busy and such. gods, I miss Sus. He was such great fun t' be around. I suppose Mayor Mitchewawa is smarter with common sense and book smarts... but I dunno. I'm gonna miss ol' Sus... he was like an older brother t'me.

Mr Frog and Splint ain't workin' on weapons no more - I dunno why. They just kind of stopped. Mr Frog's bein' mysterious - I hain't seen him for a good while now. I did hear him, tho - standin' outside his door. He keeps it locked now, mainly cause he don't want nobody to see his friend. He's got a friend like Joseph, but he don't want me to see, or nobody else. He did spray the pages of this journal with somethin', though, and I don't wanna eat it. Plus, it don't got any pretty numbers on the pages. Though... I guess I could put numbers on the pages myself...

Oh, and afore I forget, Fischer ain't a man. I was wrong. I didn't never like her, 'cause I thought somethin' was up with her - turns out Fischer's a she. She's got a beard'n all, though - or maybe it's fake, I dunno... But I'd always thought it was a man.

I still don't like her none. But at least she's good at killin' those evil things that killed Sus. They said they had a necromancer in the trade depot... I asked Splint, runnin' by, what one of them necromancers were - he said they brought dead things back to life. He left, but I'd gotten an idea - I'd immediately thought of my covies, and I ran down to the kitchen.

I threw open barrels, dumping 'em out and rolling 'em over until I found the meat I wanted - I was cryin', too, but cryin' with happiness. I wanted to laugh an' sing all at once, I did - the great, happy necromancer comin' to bring my covies back to me! I was hopin' it was Georgie boy's meat I'd grabbed, but I wasn't sure. But I knew what I had to do.

There was a dwarf who came to see me ev'ry now an' then - 'is name was... well, I

forget his name, Terra somethin'... But he was good at hidin' in the shadows, and while I was sad he taught me how to do it some, so long as I didn't look at his face - he said he'd be sick if I did. I hope he gets better soon... But anyhow, I snuck in through the shadows, sneakin' to the trade depot, and then I saw him! The necromancer man. He looked old an' wise, an' I was sure right then he could bring ol' Georgie boy back to life - an' then I'd have a cavy! But... one 'f the militia stabbed 'im right through the heart and he fell dead afore I could reach him... I cried, and threw myself on 'im, screaming at Fischer, askin' her why she did that, but she only rolled her eyes and marched off to kill the stuff outside.

They had to drag me away... I feel embarrassed 'bout it now, but oh well... Just like my grandpappy used to say - you cain't have a copper pick without a mockingbird's... oh... I forget... but anyhow, Bombzero went and sat down with me - said it was chicken I'd picked up. I didn't know! I'd just wanted my Georgie boy back, is all. Just any one 'f my cavies... gods, I hope Mayor Mitchewawa gets lots of cavies from the caravans this year. I miss 'em so. An' I hope Mr Frog starts forgettin' to lock his door again, too.

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 7: The Machine Turns**

So, considering last week's success against the Spawn, we're in a pretty good spot right now. Or we would be, if the Spawn weren't just getting stronger and stronger. We need to make more Fischers and Draigneans; Headshoots wasn't carried on the back of just two champions! My plans to properly outfit our guys in sets of iron, followed by sets of adamantine when we're ready (proper armourers, enough strands) are currently being shot by our dreadful under-population I keep banging on about. Also, we're out of bars. All of them. And ore. So, like the proper under-appreciated ladder-rung I am, I will (again) single-handedly lift our fortress up one more step, this time by procuring these valuable resources.

Strike the earth!

#### **26th Felsite:**

To properly accommodate the increase in industry, I will construct additional forges, smelters and (eventually), workers. As it stands, we have six forges (this is a good surprise twist), being supplied by two ore smelters (this is a horrible surprise twist). Naturally, none of them are being used. Additionally, all of the smelters are being set to... ugh, waste their time collecting scrap to melt down. My current plan is my personal favourite method of fixing a problem at it; throwing a lot of cheap labour at it. Six additional smelters, a large levy of furnace operators (now we have 15) and in the future (when there's enough idlers), an ore stockpile.

Oh, and birds fly, sun shines, rain is blood, and Spearbreakers will probably take at least a month to find some free time to make those smelters.

Next on my agenda is crossbow-dwarves.

PS. Woe be he who doth ignore this [MANDATE]; please for the love of Tehsid, do not kill migrants. Please.

### 5th Hematite:

A few ghosts have been put down with commemorative slabs. It was gruesome; Fischer hit one in the face and now we can't recognise who it was.

**'Rochia' Fikodsåkzul, Miner** **Give Water**

*\*tear drops can be seen scattered on the leather journal\**

### 14th Hematite:

Okay, I've cut down on, on-average, 5 jobs at a time by canceling a stone-stockpile and a bar-stockpile. Smelters can go and fetch their ores for the time being, and soon I will look for more hematite near the smelters to alleviate this a bit.

All but one of our dwarves has been released from hospital; this is good news. They're fixed, thanks to my new Medicare system.

I've given the architecture job to 40 additional dwarves, to speed up the smelter construction.

### 23rd Hematite:

Okay, I've begun digging out our mine of magnetite and hematite. The latter usually comes in veins (bad), whereas the former comes in giant clusters (good). On the other hand, hematite comes in sweet dark red... Whatever, dig it all.

I've also finally finished, and am currently linking up, the remaining repeating spike traps. Oh, and my hospital is finally finished (nearly, a bit of furniture to add yet).





The roads not only cheer up the residents, but they also keep the place clean(er). Also, note the adjacency of tables, traction benches, and beds. Each bed gets both a table and bench, all to itself. The coffins are there for a few reasons; we're filling our current ones too quickly (well, not under my rule anyway), and it'll be convenient for when the next guy takes over and promptly ruins it all.

A mason has entered a mood, and claimed a... mason shop. Masons happen to be useful, and easy to cater to, mood-wise.

### 10th Malachite:



So yeah, it's worth a lot. That should get the migrants flowing.

Some migrants have arrived.

...speaking of which. You know, I seem to recall others having trouble with Spawn ambushing migrants, so I'll keep an eye out for that.



### 25th Malachite:



Two of the migrants are... quite strange. They appear to be traders, but they won't come inside. I'm safe to assume there aren't any Spawn nearby, so I let down the alert. They still seem content to sell me their counterfeit pig-tail pants from all the way over there, so either they're legally banned from selling their 'goods' within 50 meters of civilisation, they're fucking insane or they're just lazy. Whatever. Added 5 more crafts dwarf shops to begin strand extraction too.

### 3rd Galena:

My, what a productive few months it has been. Most of the surplus furniture has finished, we received about 15 immigrants to curb the under-population, leaving us

at 85 so far. I've cut down a lot of hauling, fixed the medical system, set up the basis for weapons and armour development, dug a lot of ore, fixed a **lot** of unfinished spikes, and am about to create more jobs for strand-extraction. Also on my to-do list is memorialise those who have fallen and had not been recovered, a new military squad (axes) and perhaps... crossbows, if I have time.

The Great Plan is going along quite well; what we're going to do will set history. It will either lead us to great expansion and glory, or great ruin. Given preparation, I think we can make it.

[[Talvieno's note: This is a derail. It menaces with spikes of blast radii, drop pits of death, and Spawn trances. In the conversation are residents of Bay12. The residents are cowering. The cowering relates to the massive derail that everyone enjoyed in the early summer of 2012. This was also where Splint revealed that he'd forgotten to mention that there aren't any vampires.]]

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 8: Operation Rain**

Rain can have a significant effect on the morale of this place; it washes away the tides of blood rain that make knee-deep pools outside, it cleans us of our filth as our only water supply is silty, stagnant cave water, and it represents the polar opposite of the hardships we face; where red blood makes vile, the blue water makes clean. What the blood hides in its murkiness, the water gives clarity. The blood infects our drinking supplies, the water provides. Red and blue, good and evil.

So in me dubbing my plan 'Operation Rain' seemed not only symbolically appropriate, but physically as well, given the fantastic hue of the fabled metal Adamantine. The thirty sets of iron armour has had our armour smiths skills vastly improved. The job re-allocation and migrant waves has left a decent surplus of workers to work on idle tasks. And soon, there will be time to implement my three-step plan (estimated time to finish, four months), and enact The Great Plan. And 'Great' the Plan will be; a true test of triumph and glory that surpasses all that have come before it. It saddens me that I need to keep it hidden from the public eye, lest they frighten and turn against me...

Anyway, the three steps of 'O.R.' go as thus:

1. Revamp the entire set of squads. Revamp the training regiment, revamp who is where, revamp equipment selection and add more to all squads.

2. Adamantine equipment for most of our forces. In this world, dwarves lose. Elves are faster, humans are more cunning, goblins are crueller, the barbarians are more tenacious, and the Spawn are... the Spawn. Our strength lies in our ability to defend in any means necessary; we don't just stop at traps. We don't just stop at an army.

Our final lines are our beloved pets! We levy unarmed masses of civilians to fight armies! Hell, our women use babies as **shields and flails** if they need to. We need an edge; and nothing holds an edge better than adamantine. Our defence will be our greedy pillage of the earth.

3. Crossbows. Neglected by many leaders, yet complained about when levied by their enemies, the elves and goblins. Other civilisations can afford to lose 50 in an attack, yet we can barely afford to lose 1 in a defence. Crossbows keep people alive, and are probably similar in practicality then our beloved (*ineffectual*) pikes.

I will begin shortly.

---

### 12th Galena:



I've noticed there's a sick decoration propped up against our walls; one of our dwarves has been left outside to rot... for a few years now. Am I the only one just noticing this? Why has no one taken it down? Is it to scare away Spawn? Because I think telling them, "Oh look at how decrepit and dying we are, **oohohoho quake in your boots.**" won't quite scare them away.



Gemblade was expected to die in hospital, but we managed to get him out.



I've completely wiped the slate, ready to begin anew.

- The Invisible Walls, pikes. Fischer, Draigneau, The Master and two others. Kept in the sake of tradition and the skill of the former two.
- The Gleams of Rope, hammers. Fed, Kramar, Litar and 3 others.

- The Mechanisms of Wishing, Ace Rings and The Ferocious Oars, axe militia. Five each. These are going to be our 'recruit mill', and we'll try and train as many peasants as we can. Two led by Gemblade and Pokonic, the other by some guy.
- Mountainous Socialites, crossbows. Going to need some management later.

Out of the 'recruit mill', 9 recruits have no skill. They have been chosen based on their happiness, their usefulness and their amount of relationships. Each military dwarf is stripped of all their jobs, except for a few (such as Feb, the legendary stone crafter/expert hammerdwarf), and have been dubbed 'Army Dwarf'. At 35 military dwarves (out of 80ish residents), we stand ready to fight the Spawn, and enact the Great Plan.

There probably aren't enough axes to go around, so I'm unforbidding all invader-brought axes and am ordering 30 new iron ones.

### 13th Galena:



What! Now!? No, no, no no no. This is so not fair, we're not organised. I sounded the alert, but some are still outside. We're going to suffer casualties today. This will be my first actual loss too.

### 14th Galena:



I managed to get everyone inside, SolPyre trailing far behind anyone else. Luckily, despite his closeness to the zombies, he made it in time. After he gets in, and we close the gate, we will regroup and strike at the necromancer. The abundance of corpses outside is going to make this exercise... daunting, to say the least. Not as daunting as if we'd been forced to fight them before our guys could gather armour and arms, but still troubling none-the-less.

Let's hope that I fare better against the undead than Sus, who got our high-master armoursmith killed (and less importantly, himself).



The Spawn are here too? That makes over 90 current invaders. Well, at least they seem contempt with ripping the corpses to pieces. Lets hope they find the necromancer so we don't have to.

I've noticed one riding a bear; are the bears in league with the Spawn? We have a bear. Is it feeding them intelligence?

Oh gods.

### 19th Galena:

The Army Dwarf strikes The Song Umâsong's partial skeleton in the right upper leg with her -adamantine shield-, but the attack glances away! The Army Dwarf strikes The Song Umâsong's partial skeleton in the right hand with her -adamantine shield- and the severed part sails off in a arc!

A goblin was raised in one of our watchtowers, and Fischer has only an adamantine shield ready to fight. Why anyone made one of those things is beyond me, but at least it is training him in shields quite well.

I've created 6 extra craft-dwarf shops to extract adamantine strands. We'll arm our guys with adamantine pikes, first.

The Spawn are camping near the edge of our fortress, capable but not willing to enter our fort. Is this a 'siege'? Are they capable of intelligent and tactical thought? Are they here to protect us from the undead? Why aren't they charging in? Many questions, yet no way to get answers. Very frustrating.

## **SPLINT:**

**12th Galena, 206... 5.... whatever the fuck year it is. Interim Entry.**

Mitch has made wonderful progress getting things in order around this dump. I must say, this is a far cry from the mighty bastion I had envisioned. We seem to have medical staff either flat killing people or coming damn close to it, corpses that need to be cleaned up everywhere (I've submitted several things in writing to Mitch. Among them being a proper cremation chamber to get rid of all the bodies given past... mishaps involving Bombzero's hobby.) While Mr Frog tells me employing the blood of the earth against the spawn is a bad idea, that doesn't mean we can't minimize risk!

I've also gotten over my fear of being around that.... stuff. While I still don't trust the spires, I can at least work with this wretched material without pissing myself now.

I've also noticed something rather disturbing and going against our great nation's military doctrine. Our current overseer, despite the fact that our pikes have served us well thus far, seems adamant on putting soldiers intended to be reserve troops and specialists as mainline infantry. Pikedwarves saw us through the wars prior, the battles here, and I believe they should continue to do so! I also believe training the people to use hammers would be more beneficial, as we know how to make hammers from stone and there's enough that if we need to we can arm every able-bodied civilian with a stone warhammer should we become desperate enough. At least a hammer only requires basic instruction: You hit something, you'll hurt it. I mean for the love of the gods, I brought that damned purple glowing rock to make hammers any fool could wield like a master and the stones sit unused! Only the ones Stova made are even viable.... Oh Stova.... When it's my time to come I'll see you again. And I'll bring a hammer for each of us.

Anyway, I've got to lay down. The sound of industry picking up after months of neglect and Fischer barking orders is starting to get to me. Which reminds me, I've put in a formal request to have Draigneane assigned his own squad of raw recruits. He may be clueless and in many cases downright stupid since the various messes here began, but he's relearned his old mastery of the pike and in place of proper instructors from home, it will be on him and the colonel to train up a new force of mighty pike wielding infantry dwarves.

**15th Galena, year unknown (I've honestly lost track.) Interim Entry.**

Everyone is on edge. Between another damned migration of the dead and the spawn arriving, we're all scared to death, except for Bombzero and Draigneane. Bombzero's been eyeing through small cracks and going up into the tower with a sharpening stone, her cleaver and her pick. I honestly think she's sizing up the spawn's bear. Or possibly the spawn themselves. Oh, did I mention those damned things can ride bears? It's as if our gods are feeling the regular attacks by these damned things and the bi-yearly undead migrations weren't bad enough. Draigneane is still so suicidally overconfident I've made another request he train more soldiers. If nothing else, having soldiers unafraid of death simply by sheer force of their own inflated egos will be a thing to be praised. Although having soldiers talk like him doesn't sound appealing...



Mr Frog nearly had heart failure when Mitch said he saw a spawn riding on a fighting bear. He threw his food across the table, bolted for the tower and looked like he'd been sucked dry by a vampire when he came back. I haven't seen him since, insisting he needs to calibrate the saw-weapons. I tried to go in to help him out, but his door is locked better than it used to be. Given his irrational behavior, I decided to ask Fischer to try and force it open, but we quickly stopped when he threatened to "Shove my [his] foot so far up your [my] ass I'll be able to use your o-ring for an ankle bracelet" and that he'd make Fischer "Do a pirouette on that fancy metal stick while it's rammed soundly through both ends of your digestive tract!"

This is quite honestly the first time he's resorted to such threats beyond simple insults and occasionally drugging someone's food if he didn't like them. But given his access to equipment that can render even the cursed metal into little more than scraps, I ordered Fischer to stand down. She would have gotten us both killed after her pike was insulted.

I honestly think a lot of people have started becoming a touch unhinged around here. Insults have been flying more than normal, a suit of armor went missing (We found it in the trash chute two days ago,) SolPyre almost got killed by zombies, Bombzero is complaining more and more about not chopping things up, Sgt. Ashsaber started getting uppity again, probably calling for help from the trueborn spawn topside, Talvieno's been crying for her cavies (No-one had the heart to tell her a lot of them died on their own and Bombzero 'took care of' their remains)....

If we make it past the next year, the gods will have been smiling on us.

## HORRIDOWN4GE:

Journal of Kramar

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12th of Galena:

It all began quite well, I arrived at Spearbreakers a year ago or so and today I finally got the honour to participate in the military as a Hammerdwarf. I have some experience with crutches so it couldn't be that hard right?

Our squad is named: The Gleams of Rope, and we're basically the forts last defense if everything else fails.

13th of Galena:

The dead rose once again but Fischer and the like will take care of them so I can relax and hone my skills a bit.

A vile force of darkness has arrived!

Oh god it's the fucking spawn again and they're riding on fucking war trained Grizzly bears, dear fucking Armok what?!

Most of them are waiting outside our fortress, waiting for us to come out of our little

hidey hole in the mountain.

I also overheard Fischer handing out death threats to dwarfs like their leaflets.

**(Mr Frog):** This is a derail. All craftsnerdship is of the most haphazard quality. It is adorned with hanging rings of zombies and menaces with spikes of pitchblende and radiation sickness. On the item is an image of a mushroom cloud and dwarves in uranium by Sus. The dwarves are vaporizing.

[[Talvieno's note: This speaks for itself.]]

**(TerraheX):** really guys 86 pages. It's gonna take forever to catch up.

**(Splint):** Use Talvieno's post to keep track. He's basically our resident chronologist of what goes on.

**(TerraheX):** lol. in the meantime my dwarf has been acting as messenger and observer for the overseer right?

**(Splint):** Just gave a look through the journals. If I recall right you were apparently teaching Talvi the fine art of not being noticed.

**(Mr Frog):** Maybe we're all figments of Talvi's imagination.

**(Splint):** But how would that explain everything happening at once? unless Joseph's been messing with her mind....

[[Talvieno's note: This is yet another origin theory.]]

## SPLINT:

*- You wander the old tower, having killed the residents, and stare in awe at the endless rows of books. Suddenly, a spine with bands of gold leaf along the top and bottom catches your eye, and you take it down. It clearly hasn't seen the light of day in some time. There is evidence it was used as a coaster for a rather large mug at some point. You look at the cover, bound in Elk leather and decorated with gold leaf and onyx, it is a truly wonderful sight, despite the numerous marks on it from the afore mentioned mug.*

*You decide to look into it, to see if it has any arcane knowledge within...*

## *Barbaris de Vastarent Montes*

*The Barbarians of the Wasted Mountains*

### **Introduction-**

Strange beings are they who call themselves the mountain barbarians. They are black of hide and heart, and favor the blade and flail over any other form of weapon. Our first encounter was when these madmen had razed a fishing village to the ground after they had beached their warships. Every man and woman was slain in the massacre, but the children were spared. At first we thought this compassion, but latter found they were of slaverous intent, selling or otherwise brainwashing the children of the village.

We were oblivious to the threat of course. And they spread quickly, killing and enslaving all in their path until the vampiric war erupted. They had, according to their own chroniclers whom I was able to speak with so long as I left my weapons with the village warlord's men, had decided to leave the natives of this, to them, new and strange land and turned their attentions back to the sea during the war, though they have allegedly helped those who's battles strayed near their taken ground. They said that they had wheeled around to stave off their "Great Enemy" who we now know to be the Spawn of Holistic from the legends spread by sea-going merchants from coming to and from Everoc to the east. Evidently, they suffered heavily in the battles with those things as they, as one worded it "Swam, floated, or even *walked* here from the Old Land." They fought long and hard against the Spawn of Holistic, as did the Coalition of Nations did against the Vampiric Empire.

From what I understand, they suffered many a death due to lost supply trains, the occasional wandering vampire, and to the horrible storms that ravage the eastern coasts of our great continent. They eventually gave up and made moves to take Coalition fortresses, and established strongholds nearby or in the mountains. Of course, being weary from the Vampiric War, we didn't stop them. Nor did we stop the Spawn as they took root in our own mountains.

The Barbarians continued to fight any who crossed their holdings, and have since become increasingly aggressive, seeking any they can to "reeducate" to fill the growing gaps in their armies. I have been told that they plan to launch exploratory raids against a small outpost called Spearbreakers. But they don't plan on being able to do much against dwarves, whom they hold in high regard for their ancestors' stands at Headshoots and Syrupleaf. I am also told that them aside, they hold a place even here considered not but a legend, as the most sacred of battlegrounds and holy places, some besotted and abandoned place called Swordthunders, a place where hell itself was said to be conquered. Whether or not that the dwarves of our lands will be able to hold a candle to their long dead ancestors, remains to be seen.

Now, I will begin my proper lecture on the culture of the Barbarian...

*-The book appears to be stuck past here, you set it aside and hope, your lust for knowledge that brought you here having been given a taste of new information on another culture, there are other copies that don't have dried booze holding the pages together somewhere in this mess.*

## **TERRAHEX:**

### **1st Excerpt from the 2nd Diary of Terrahex the Dwarf**

Dear diary,

Hey it's me again! Sorry that Talvi ate all of your other pages. I put the date onto each and every page of you because I never write in the date at all in my entrees, but Talvi seems to have grown this sixth sense for numbered pages.

What makes matters worse is that she still refuses to eat any meat at all now that everyone lost track of the cavy meat after she spilled it all, so now she's ravenously hungry and eats any numbered paper she finds anywhere. Just yesterday she was prowling around Splint's old bookkeeping office, but the door was sealed years ago with all the old records inside. She's already eaten entire diaries of other dwarves too. I was scared for you diary, so I erased all the dates on your pages.

Still, as mean as it was for Talvi to eat you, she remains one of my only friends. I talk to her sometimes, but I'm still a little squeamish around her. I always feel like she's just judging me, even though I'm almost sure she doesn't care. She wants a friend right now just as much as I do. I know how it is to lose a friend.

I used to teach her how to hide in the shadows, but I've already taught her as well as I can, which is to say not nearly well enough. I've taught her the basics of course, but I'm still a lousy teacher. The only thing she can do now is practice.

Mr Frog is... well he's doing better I suppose. He's been muttering to himself lately. I think that I've remastered staying hidden too. No body has seen me at all unless I wanted them to, except Talvi who, now that I've taught her how to hide, has also begun to learn how to see. Anyway, I've been keeping an eye on Mr Frog. He keeps mumbling under his breath about the spawn outside. They've been learning he says. I don't know why it surprises him.

That reminds me. The spawn have done it again! They saved us from the necromancers! But... this time I feel something different about them, diary. I don't know what it is, but something just seems off. When they came, it rained blood again, but that's not anything unusual for Spearbreakers. This blood was different though. It was cavy blood.

I know how to tell blood apart, diary, I've lived through the vampire wars. This is cavy blood that continues to rain down upon us. Nobody else thankfully has noticed the difference. It's a bad I know, but revealing the omen would cause more strife than necessary.

Also, note to self: investigate Joseph.

## **SPLINT:**

### **16th Galena, year I have no idea. Interim Entry.**

Terrahex has brought it to my attention that Talvieno hasn't been eating well since

Bombzero accidentally fed her some cavy stew. As such, I'd asked her to go through and toss out any cavy meat. Shove it all into a magma furnace, or something. She barely leaves her room anymore except to get a drink of booze when she does want it. I've also sent a request to Mitchewawa to request a small number of cavies for Talvieno, in hopes they will lift her spirits.

I must say, Terrahex has been doing wonderfully as a messenger and, for lack of a better term, spy. He had managed to slip into my office and get behind me without my noticing. Nearly gave me heart failure. I asked why he hadn't gone to the Overseer, and he said he was busy with something.

I have hopes that the requests will be heeded, as having a dwarf all bent out of shape is bad for morale.

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

**Year 205, the rule of Mitch**

**Chapter 9: Goblins, Zombies and Spawn; How too much of bad  
can be good**



An ambush! Curse them!  
An ambush! Curse them!  
An ambush! Curse them!  
An ambush! Curse them!  
An ambush! Curse them!

You know, the zombies are putting up a heck of a fight. Mostly because every zombie disemboweled by the Spawn can be re-animated by necromancers who wait in hiding. The Spawn, despite not being able to find the necromancer, are stuck in a loop of fighting constantly rising corpses of all races. And now a veritable **army** of goblin ambushes has come to give them something else to kill... and add to the corpse pile.

I think the necromancers are going to win.

**15th Galena:**



It seems my recent conscription has been unpopular, one particular dissenter masquerading to have an 'injury' just so he doesn't have to work. (Hey, these calendar works I nicked were pretty neat).



The crowded hallways are beginning to slow down production. I know our previous rulers weren't expecting to survive for as long as we have, and grow as much as we are, but this is still a problem punishable with incessant nagging and fixing. The fact that this is a **major hallway**, with only 2 staircases and 2-wide corridors, leaves me to believe that our previous overseers were all too busy making their own personal rooms filled to the brim with pitchblende hammers with which to give themselves blunt-trauma lobotomies.

*\*Note to self, need to write that speech down for future use and reference\**

I've begun work on expanding all corridors and staircases.

### 18th Galena:

You know, the battle outside there is quite a display. Looking from the watch tower, there are body bits flying all over the place; literally. Some parts are flying up multiple stories high, and this is a particular joy that I simply can't sketch a picture of.



Uhh... what? From where? Oh, underneath our wells where nothing without wings can get in. Good job.



The zombies haven't killed many Spawn, and from this point on they probably won't be able to.

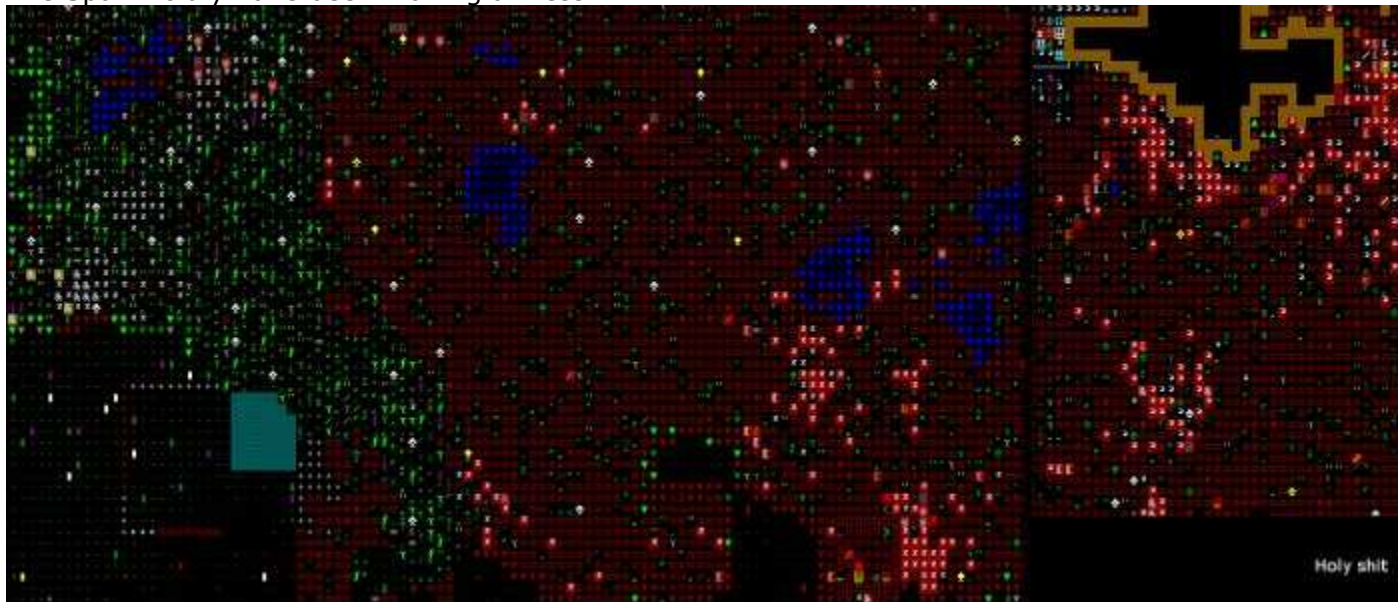
I've ordered the armoury expanded. Guys are walking miles just to pick up equipment.

### **16th Limestone:**

A while has passed with little happening. The necromancer is still out there, there's a zombie hand stuck in a tree. I've built a few roads to spruce the place up. Dug a large area for extended storage, on the top level.

Begun work on a well from the hospital, this should reduce travel times.

The Spawn truly have been making a mess



### **20th Limestone:**

Rodge, our miner has entered a secretive mood. He's adequate in armour and weaponsmithing, but an adept mason. Shame, I'd prefer an artifact adamantite axe or breastplate, not some gabbro ass-plug or whatever.

### **11th Sandstone:**

The training of the recruits is going extremely slowly, but I get the feeling it will pick up. It has to, in order to enact The Great Plan within my time.

[[Talvieno's note: Mitchewawa took a very, very long time to update after this. The thread never lost activity, and derailed everywhere. We invented rederailing, I'm pretty sure.]]

**(Niccolo):** This has been an utterly fantastic read, boys and girls. I've spent the past few hours reading through everything, getting completely up to date. Holy shit this place is made out of a very special kind of crazy. Not the world-burning hatred of Boatmurdered, the "holy fuck everything's going to crap again" of Headshoots or even the bizarre storyish crazy of Syrupleaf. It's a rather different brand of crazy. You're actually trying to stay alive rather than screw over Overseer (N+1) - and yet everything's *still* going to pot. *The game is actively defying your attempts to force order on this hellhole.*

## TERRAHEX:

### **2nd Excerpt from the 2nd Diary of Terrahex the Dwarf**

Dearest Diary-est

Today I was doing the usual, delivering messages while working odd jobs. I'm excellent at message delivering. I'm faster than a speeding cavy and I know all the shortcuts through the dark. Of course, I can't talk to people, but most of the dwarves can read (I think). I just leave notes where the receiving end will find them when they need it and call it a delivery.

Splint is usually the only one who needs me to do things since I don't talk to the new overseer. I used to deliver for Sus but... I'll never forget him. He was a good man. I was the one who found out about his... current condition. I'm used to enemies not being able to see me, but zombies are another matter. They KNOW where I am. It makes me queasy just thinking about it.

I do feel kind of guilty for not offering to take messages for Mitchewawa. He is the overseer after all, but I still really only talk limited times with Talvi and Splint. Some others know I'm there, namely Mr Frog, but I don't really talk to anyone else. They just know that when a message pops up to read it.

Querido Diario

Talvi was pawing at Mr Frog's door again last night. Mr Frog keeps locking it on her for some reason. They used to be such great friends. I wonder what happened between the two of them. I'll try to ask her next time I work up the courage to speak.

Draigneau has been active today. He hasn't said anything regrettable since last Monday when he commented on how Bombzero's surplus weight might come from how she sometimes gnaws the meat off of bones as she butchers. I'm pretty sure that she's been peeing in/on his food since.

Anyway, Draigneau was insulting Fischer on her teaching methods for the new recruits when Fischer suddenly stabbed her training pike into Draigneau's foot and told him to do it himself, storming off to grab a beer from the stocks. I'm pretty sure that she's still mad about the comment he made about her weight last Monday. The bad thing is, the new recruits are actually learning faster from him.

In other news that forgotten beast has been terrorizing all the poor dwarves that drink out of the well. It's scary and on fire they say, but they never mention if it can climb up the well. I hope it can't because I don't like fiery, scary things.

I actually decided to look down the well, too but all I could see was the water far, far below. Hopefully the fiery guy fell in. I feel mean saying that. maybe I should apologize.

NICCOLO:

**Quote from: Draigneon on March 15, 2012, 07:31:21 pm**

*"As you know,"* I announced, my perfect voice ringing out across the horde of dwarves and war dogs, *"the key factor in any battle is the element of surprise."* As I spoke I motioned for the miner to drive his pick through the remaining veil of earth that separated us from the spawn.

*"SURPRISE"*



Why, yes. Those are his bare legs.

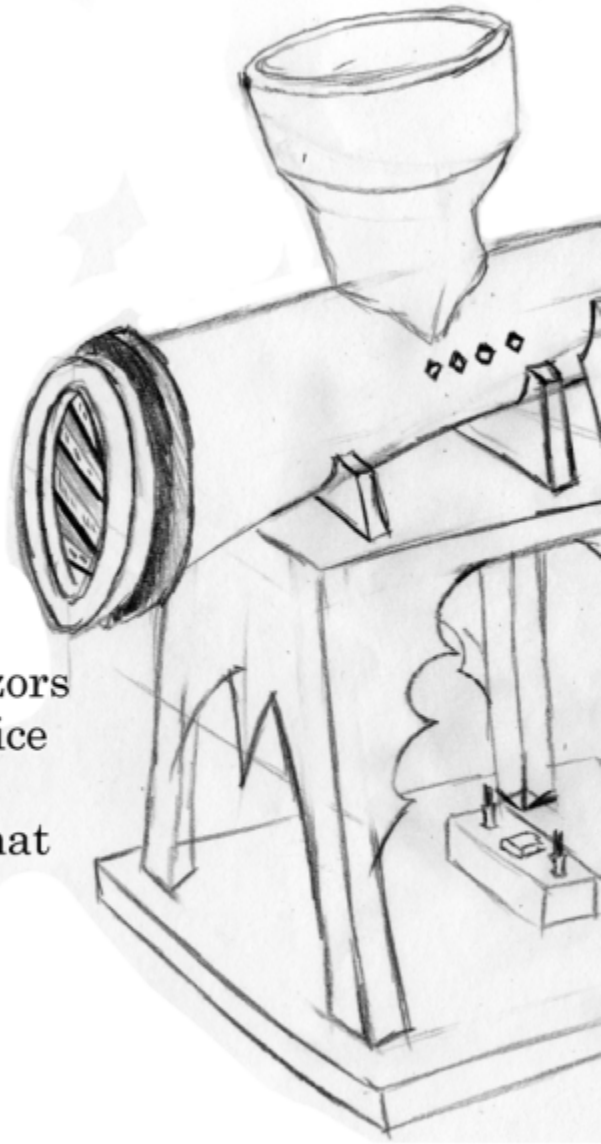
NICCOLO:

Right, time to mix things up a little! Splint, I thank your lovely phrasing for this quick little gem:

Introducing the new, improved, Armok™ Brand Juicer!



Multiple powerful razors  
ensure maximum juice  
extraction!  
Never miss out on that  
tasty juice again!



Warning. Use may lead to unprecedented levels of cackling, plotting and murder.  
Do not use if pregnant, breastfeeding, epileptic, asthmatic or mortal. Armok™  
accepts no liability for the loss of limbs, life, family, local barbarians or cats through  
the use, either correct or incorrect, of this product.

This product

The idea was... what if Armok decided to market a juicer to the world? Frankly, he'd suck at making it practical, safe and not evil.

NICCOLO:

Only look if you're not too squeamish. Seriously.





Yeah, these bastards were in my nightmares a few nights ago. So now y'all can have a serving of my interpretation of the Spawn.

**(OVERLORDTNT):**

here's a limerick

There was a dwarf name John Cloot  
He went to Stonehall  
He found a spawn in his soup  
And was reduced to a smear on the wall

**(TALVIENO):**

Don't limericks have four lines? Like...

There once was a young dwarf named Talvi  
Who went mad from something past freaky.  
Hasn't been the same since  
Her own mind's self-defense:  
She turned herself into a cavy.

**(STORMTEMPLAR):**

In response to the DF limerick: Spearbreakers Haiku!

Set up new fortress  
Spawn bites corrupt our dwarfs  
Armok help us all

Six overseers gone  
Seven doomed Starting Dwarfs  
total still sane: Nil

Army full of pikes  
Our Enemies are [NO\_PAIN]  
Splint is a moron

"Powerful pro army"  
Primary cause of enemy death?  
Fighting each other.

Edit:

Brave army fights our war  
Carried home to hospital  
Shoulda stayed down

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 10: The Great Preparation**

Winter is coming. We're not even close to ready for the Great Plan; that which the voices in my head sent down from **gods** will make Spearbreakers head-to-waist greater than any fabled fortress of old. Deathgate, the fortress that conquered hell? Hah, a deceased relic. We will best the method of dropping a mountain on the heads of demons. Syrupleaf? Our land is even more hostile; with a sky that bleeds, the undead siege us and the Spawn are even greater.

The Plan is coming, and soon we will display the wrath of our gods, **a thousand fold**.

#### **12th Sandstone:**

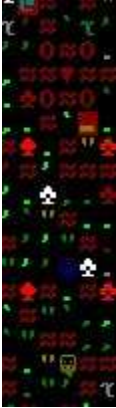
I've sent miners down to dig out our battlefield. I have not officially told anyone what I am doing, but the miners are starting to rumour.



Rodge has created an artifice bed, made from coal! Artifact, flammable rock are blessed to never stop burning if lit. How can we use this...? Or if we cannot, how cool would it be to have a set of smoke chimneys?

#### **21st Sandstone:**

Migrants! In the middle of a Spawn siege! Open the gate and run!



Luckily, some make it. The Spawn are on the other side of the fortress, killing the constantly re-animating dead.



Uhh, never mind. Send in the squads, protect the migrants! I want that high-master weaponsmith in here now!

Four(!) migrants make it in, the one caught by Spawn dodging in the right direction and escaping. The military took down the Spawn that got in, and the gates were sealed. Five outside were left for dead.

### 15th Timber:

**A vile force of darkness has arrived!**

Aha! Goblins! An enemy we can kill! Open the gates, it will be fun to watch a lot of things die that aren't us for a change... I do hope the goblins find and kill the necromancer too.

### 21st Timber:

**As Nimakfikod, Farmer has been found dead, contorted in fear!**

What the hell?! A murderous ghost of one of the 'traders' killed a farmer! We must *quickly* memorialise this monster.

Goblins went on a massive zombie killing spree, yet failed to kill any necromancers. Still, it is nice to think that we're excited over the arrival of goblins, whilst others fear them.

### 2nd Moonstone:

Ah, I have come so far in only half a year. Our military is fully equipped with arms

and armour, and I believe it is time to enact The Great Plan...

*Addendum: If anyone else finds this journal, it means I have failed. Pass on overseership to Domas, he's a right-minded fellow. You're probably wondering what happened to me and the entire army of Spearbreakers; if I have indeed failed, I implore you not to go looking for us. We went to 'strike the earth', just as the gods have commanded me, like an ever-beating drum in my head. Use my journal as a guide, but do not follow my glory-hungry quest.*

*PS. I haven't been writing in great detail my last few pages; have been quite busy with the logistics of The Great Plan, along with a few trivialities whose mention will only waste both of our times.*

*Signed, with you in bouts of great insight, and bouts of great stupidity, Mitch.*

## NICCOLO

It turns out that I kinda suck at rhyming. But here goes, my first entry as Fortress Historian:

### **Stenelzarustuth, Year 200**

*Deep within the sombre woods  
Where blood falls from the sky like rain  
The sounds of digging are in concert  
as foolish Dwarves seek to hide from pain*

*Seven they came from fortresses safe  
to make a nascent home in the mud  
knew well they thought of the crises to come  
But this mistake would be writ in blood*

*The place came to be called Stenelzarustuth  
As the leader did sneeze upon uttering the name  
But lo and behold was 'Spearbreakers' born  
So would spears stand against those who came*

*Led were they by one called Splint  
Who saw fit to name himself the o'erseer  
So to build a haven against the darkness,  
He swore to lead them by pick and spear*

*Charred flesh could be smell'd from all the soil  
Deter them not did this most foul of scents  
The gems and the ore were a well-earned prize  
And to flee this bounty would they be incensed.*

*The green month came, bearing seven dwarves  
Foolish, hardy and yet a boon were they  
But among them was a terror to behold  
A master of war and the Master his name*

*The bravest sons of Spearbreakers trained  
They earned the name of Families of Laboring  
By the score did ravens fall to wooden pikes  
Truly, they were a credit to their schooling*

*The soldiers itched with the lust of battle  
Yet only thieves and merchants came to their home  
Yet ov'r the horizon did strange things stir  
Terrifying visages of stretched skin and bone*

*Blood would flow soon enough for the dwarves  
'Twould be as the sky predicted with tears  
But foolish dwarves bade not care to their dreams  
So would come the greatest test of their spears.*

[[Talvieno's note: derailed into discussions of railguns, serrated disc launchers, mughammers, and the like. Splint wanted to add most of this in from the beginning.]]

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

### **Year 205, the rule of Mitch Chapter 11: Strike The Earth!**

#### **The events as they happened; 3rd Moonstone**

*The tunnels and stairs were filled with soldiers, whose marching and whispering echoed throughout. Mitch and Rodge, the latter carrying a pick, trailed behind the steel and adamantine clad warriors. There were many haulers, carrying the bright blue strands to the forgery stockpiles, who had to step out of the way of the legion. The mood of Spearbreakers was down, but the sight of all that adamantine armour at least comforted them, and showed their efforts at least had an effect on the fortress.*

*All the warriors, totaling twenty nine, were lead into a room filled with dogs, bears and emus. This was used to be the area that lead down into the adamantine spire, but Mitch had changed it. It looked like a **battlefield**. They did not know why they were here, nor what Mitch was even making down here all along. Still, they trusted him. Everyone did. Many of them were alive because of his great efforts to overhaul the medical system, which had been a death-trap before. Because of his great tactical genius, they had defeated an entire squad of Spawn without taking a single injury, despite less men, few equipment and the fact that Fischer was ambushed*

*alone. Hell, their arms and armour, superior to their old ones of shoddy make, poor material or just plain non-existent were a product of Mitch's good foresight, and they were made in record time due to his smart work-force shift, and his ability to not get migrants killed. Yes, they all trusted Mitch. Perhaps he brought them down here to fight the animals, or some other military exercise?*

*Mitch stood by the staircase down to the spire, stood on a slab of microcline and cleared his throat to ready a speech.*

"Okay guys, I'm sure you are wondering what I've been doing down here. Have you also ever wondered why we do not get enough migrants? It is because this place is a death trap, and for little to no worth. Seriously, our main export is fucking **mugs** that even **we** do not drink out of. We live in a place that **rains blood**. Do you know how disgusting that is, without having lived here for a few years? People coming here are more likely to be ambushed and killed by the Spawn that infest this land then to actually arrive here safely. Our dead outnumber the living by **Citizens <90> Dead/Missing <899>**. That is ridiculous! Simply put, we need people to know Spearbreakers. Fame is power is wealth."

*One of the soldiers chimed in, "But what are we going to do? No one will see what it is we're doing down here..."*

*Mitch gathered himself a bit, realising he had been rambling for a bit, "Ah, yes. We're going to take hell. All of it. Kill the demons with only our blades, and our dogs."*

*Some of the soldiers laughed, but others were unnerved. A different one then before spoke again, "Uhh, how?"*

*Mitch simply chuckled, and took the pick from Rodge's hands, him being paralysed with horror at what he just heard. **"Strike the earth!"***



*But before Mitch could bring down the pick, he was struck with a better idea. What if, instead of having everyone get killed by demons in melee combat, we simply surround the room with fortifications? And have archers practice on the demons? They could do so behind two sets of fortifications, to keep them out of range of breath attacks. They'll be safe!*



"Don't worry lads! I have a better idea!"

*A sigh of relief spread across the room.*

"Clear out for now, but we'll be back. And next time, we're going to just use archers. It will be like shooting kobolds in a barrel!"

---

*A few hours after the incident, the soldiers were still trying to recuperate from the shock. Mitch was down in the battle area, setting up safe fortifications. Truly, his plan will be fulfilled, just at a later date. And with less deaths! That was the kind of ruler he tried to be; not brash and glorious, but safe. And there's more glory in fighting hell and **winning**.*

[[Talvieno's note: This is actually what happened. Mitch changed his mind, and hell wasn't invaded this year.]]

## OVERLORDTNT:

*Diary of Black Sankis, last king of Boatmurdered*

I have been locked away, in the deepest depths of hell for so long . . .

But now is my time. I turned the champions of Headshoots into monsters, i created the spawn, who, like the little darlings they are, are conquering the world for me. Now is the time of Black Sankis, last lord of hell! I write this upon the slade walls of my cell with my own blood!

[[Talvieno's note: The Warhammer 40k-style weaponry derail has continued since I last mentioned it. Despite the update. Serious hardcore derailing.]]

**(Mr Frog):** Well, the radiation is cool (Talvieno's random generator is brilliant). Adds a bit more strategy to the game -- and I'm not just saying that because it was me who came up with the initial concept, got it? :p

### **Explanations for people who are completely lost:**

Radiation: A custom regional interaction I made that afflicts creatures in affected regions with various mutations. Talvieno later wrote a script that automatically generates a list of random symptom sets.

Scythod: Vaguely-arthropodal alien from a mod me and Talvieno were working on. Was originally supposed to have testicle-eyes, but you'll be pleased to know that I vetoed it. Talvieno made this one; there's another one that I made. That one doesn't have testicle-eyes either.

Manamaids: Burlesque-dancing manatees in lingerie. More of a cautionary tale showing what happens when a brainstorming session is allowed to go on past 3am.  
Serrated Disc Launcher: A WMD created to satisfy Splint's lust for severed body parts. In other words, exactly what it sounds like.  
Automatons: No idea.

**(Splint):** Manamaids can make you pass out and bleed from your eyes simultaneously. That's their power, "Bust a sexy move!"  
And I really have no way to adequately describe just how god-awful to look at they are in general....

## OVERLORDTNT:

Diary of Black Sankis

By the hells, my spawn are effective. I keep finding packs of them near Spearbreakers, possessing the leader, and, *ahem*, redirecting them. Also, i have ordered them to look for individuals by the name of Sankis. There were Sankis's at Syrupleaf and Headshoots, so there might be some here. I want to know how the family is doing!

**(OverlordTNT):** My theory on the existence of Spearbreakers (like there isn't enough of the bullshit about)  
The lesser gods(randomly generated ones) were ashamed at leaving the mighty mountainhomes buried under obsidian. So they came back after three days, and dug away all the obsidian. They ransacked the breweries of the mountainhomes for seeds, and regrew plants all over the world. This attracted the attention of the Spawn(as Holistic is dead) and they promptly came back to fuck up the dwarves shit.

**(Reudh):** My theory:  
Tithleth still inhabits this rock and is now the Big Bad.  
[[Talvieno's note: Derailed into how humans are superior to dwarves.]]

## MITCHEWAWA:

**Year 205, the rule of Mitch  
Chapter 12: Monument**

Winter; the season before spring (I am told). That means my time as overseer is... drawing. It seems strange that after all I've done there is still more to do. So much more. The recruits are still making their fetal deer steps toward a force, I haven't even touched the marksdwarfs, not enough people are suited in adamantine... I haven't even made an insane monument to myself! I suppose I'll do that, then. But I won't tell anyone what it is. The only ones that will know will be our enemies...

### **3rd Moonstone:**



Sus II, such as I would expect a Sus descendant to be, chose to very stupidly risk his life for a pig tail sock someone left outside. Well, thanks to my training, he came back with a couple of pairs of socks.

I have begun carving of my monument. It was rather tricky to design, and it's probably too dark down there to see it anyway. But who cares? Only the smart will be able to pick it up, and I wouldn't care for anything less.

I have discovered a giant reason for our work-load sink hole. Someone left a continuous order to construct rock doors, coffers, coffins and cabinets. Why, when we have so much, I do not understand. I've ordered that shit cancelled.

### **10th Moonstone:**

Bombzero was caught in a cave-in, and suffocated. This is probably the most tragic thing that has happened to Spearbreakers in recent memory, actually.

### **13th Moonstone:**

My overseership has been... relatively quiet all year. I get the feeling like my vast sanity somehow just make things not go wrong as much as all the other years. Improving conditions for Spearbreakers is what I set out to do, though, not mayhem. It looks like I have succeeded.



Goblins! I forgot to close the gate!

Greenback is fighting hard, but one of them got a good hit in. Luckily, the rest of the squad got in just in time to save him.

## **16th Moonstone:**

Greenback died. Outside. What was he doing there? Why not in the hospital? Who knows.

On the good side, the monument has been completed. People have noticed I've become increasingly reclusive, but perhaps that is just what overseership does to those with the drive for glory, such as me.

**(Mitchewawa):** Update coming tomorrow. Would do it tonight but I burnt all of my fingers today with hot glue gun.  
Was making a Johnny Bravo hair.

**(ThatAussieGuy):** Well that just raises more questions than it answers, doesn't it?

**(Paintbrushturkey):** so what's the REAL reason you've been burning your fingerprints off? 🤔

**(Splint):** Clearly he is planning on escaping to Mexico and hoping to avoid Interpol.

**(Paintbrushturkey):** lol, ns if a hot glue gun is the way to go here either, just saying....

**(Hanslanda):** John Dillinger couldn't even do it with ACID. You might oughta just keep your normal person fingerprints, they're LESS traceable than hideously burnt and melted Evil person fingerprints.

**(Aseaheru):** fingerprints don't grow back. I'm missing part of one from a food processor around 5 years ago.

**(Mr Frog):** They will. Eventually. In the meantime, be sure to use your powers of conspicuously-partial fingerprints for good and not evil.

**(Aseaheru):** its only one finger and it got cut almost down to the bone so now i have this VERRY odd fingerprint.

**(Paintbrushturkey):** I'm rather scared as to how active this thread has become again with the mention of finger print removal ^\_^

**(Splint):** Well. A planes shifting guy in Johnny Bravo hair is hilarious to imagine.

**(Hanslanda):** I am now picturing all Spearbreakers staff with Johnny Bravo hair, and I gotta say that Draigneau pulls it off best.

**(Mr Frog): Totally-Serious Theory on the Origin Of Spearbreakers**

Mitchewawa, having burnt his fingerprints off and crafted the perfect Johnny Bravo disguise, goes incognito and vanishes from all official records along with several million dollars' worth of ballpoint pens. He then uses this nest egg to kick-start a shady R+D firm, after which he develops planeshifting technology and escapes into the multiverse. Several years later, his corporation hires a failed freelance drug dealer/bioengineer named Mr Frog off the street and Mitch -- now drunk with power after many years of having prosthetic Johnny Bravo hair -- decides it'd be funny to bring back the Spawn. And the rest is dubiously-canon history.

[[Talvieno's note: While this was a seemingly pointless derail, it had the added effect of introducing a second interdimensional company alongside Parasol: Ballpoint Technology.]]

[[Talvieno's note: I'm putting this note out here by itself so it'll be sure to get your attention. Mitchewawa's turn is almost over at this point, but unfortunately, he took almost a month on it. Stormtemplar, the next player, spent a month "getting around to it", and we suffered a severe case of Schedule Slippage (see TvTropes). Finally he gave up, and the turn was given to Paintbrushturkey. In the meantime, a huge number of story posts were posted. You won't be reading them in posting order. In fact, you won't be reading them anywhere *near* to the order in which they were posted. You're going to be reading it properly: according to the chronology. Basically, you won't have to worry about what happens when, and who does what where, because I'm taking care of that for you. It'll take away a lot of the confusion... unless you decide to read through the thread to see all the masterwork derails. If you didn't read this note, you'll wonder just exactly why I butchered the post order.]]

[[Talvieno's note: You'll be reading a lot of stories between now and Paintbrushturkey's turn. Is this "fanfic"? No. These stories were largely written by overseers (past and future), and are actually part of the official canon. Skipping them will likely leave you confused.]]

**(Mitchewawa):** - Aseaheru is still alive. [[Talvieno's note: Interestingly, nobody noticed this when it was posted.]]

- Sus III is now a traction-bench bound army dwarf. Punishment for leaving me the fort in the middle of a necromancer battle 🤪

**(Sus):** Not the hospital! D:

Oh, wait, you fixed it, didn't you? Please tell me you did.

**(Mitchewawa):** I did. Now you've got the best care a paraplegic dwarf could dream of 🤪

**(Mr Frog):** YOU MONSTER. That hospital was our greatest weapon! One that could only be used on ourselves, but still.  
Hey, guess this means Sus III will actually stay alive, right? ...Right?

**(Splint):** I wouldn't get my hopes up. I'm sure Stormtemplar will figure out a way to make it a deathtrap again.

**(Mr Frog):** I predict that, even if storm were to deliberately sabotage every single industry in the fortress, absolutely nothing bad would come of it and another completely-unrelated problem would arise from a completely-unexpected and bizarre source. This is the fort that was delayed for a week to fine-tune the Spawn and founded on the edge of a Terrifying biome, yet went on to have its own hospital as its archnemesis. This is the fort where the primary means of fending off invaders is other, meaner invaders. This is Spearbreakers, where all goddamn bets are off.

**(Hanslanda):** That [post] is pure unadulterated awesome.

**(Splint):** Damn straight. Anyone got a good story to pass the time until Mitch gets around to finishing?

**(Hanslanda):** I'll try my hand at it.

## HANSLANDA:

The dwarf edged up to the corner, his spear gripped tightly in both hands, desperately trying to keep his bronze armor from clattering. As he reached the corner, he paused for a moment to wipe the copious amount of sweat off his forehead, his eyes tightly closed. He felt that horrible tingle in his beard, like static electricity running across his face. A spawn was around the corner, he just knew it. He kept thinking, 'Nothing there, nothing there, nothing there...'.  
The sturdy creature sprang around the corner, spear readied to impale the vicious beast, but the corridor was empty. The dwarf grimaced, knowing that only meant he'd have to hunt it down through the labyrinth of dormitories, barracks, and bedrooms on this level. He edged forwards slowly, barely breathing in his attempts to be silent. His feet cautiously picked out their next movement to avoid rasping against the floor, or letting his boot thunk against the smooth stone. He came upon the first room of this wing, with a beautifully decorated gneiss door. Again, he psyched himself out, and kicked open the door, spear leading.

Empty.  
By the blood god, this was getting hard. He thought at his squad furiously, mentally begging them to hurry to his aid, but he knew that the trip from the magma sea to this high a level took nearly an hour. He'd be long dead before they got here if he needed help. He continued on his mission, kicking open empty rooms, no longer concerned about stealth. Surely the beast had heard the first door bang open. Odds were he was being hunted now. Like a damn deer.



The frightened dwarf finally reached the dormitories and barracks, having cleared over forty small rooms. He slid the door open gently, scanning the room for threats. Nothing. Then he heard it. That raspy, gurgling double breathing of two mouths. He pinpointed it with his beard. That door. It was right there, behind the door.

Watching him.

The door edged open eerily, in a cruel parody of his entering the room. The twisted, monstrous creature stepped into the room slowly, its evil rictus grin of vicious teeth and leering eyes pinning the dwarf where he stood. He was looking into the eyes of his death. The death of all dwarves. One bite, and he'd be a monster, just like the spawn.

It walked toward him, its long arms and stubby legs eating the distance swiftly. Just a few feet from him, he remembered his spear, his armor, and most of all, his family.

His first blow sheared through its left wrist, severing its beclawed hand. It roared fiercely, lumbering forward, and swiped at him with its unharmed limb, and he rolled backwards, coming up into a crouch, spear braced against a bed. The charging beast impaled itself onto the spear, the tip piercing through its blackened heart. As it died, its mouth moved gently, not snapping like a beast, but like the last words of a dying dwarf.

The soldier could almost hear the words...

Thank you.

What the soldier really heard was the roar of more spawn. Two, then a third, then more, burst into the room. He pushed the dead spawn off his spear, and drew his dagger. As they encircled him, his mind cleared, his beard hairs spiked out straight like divining rods, and his pupils dilated hugely. Time seemed to slow infinitely, and he saw such detail. The ropes of vile, corruptive spit hanging from their jaws. The blood of kills on their claws. The patches of unkempt hair, and the ruined beard hairs hanging limp and dead from their chins. The beautiful eyes, still the same color as the living dwarves' had been.

He moved like a snake, striking and coiling. Their strikes were so slow, telegraphed and clumsy. There was no way they could touch him. He rolled past a snapping chest maw, between the leg and the arm, hearing the steel-hard teeth digging into the floor behind him. His dagger slashed off a reaching hand. He kicked a knee, and as the creature stumbled, impaled a brain. He spun around the dying beast, only the dagger in his hand, the spear lodged too firmly to recover.

A brutal sidekick from one of the spawn sent the dwarf skidding across the dormitory, under a table and into a wall. He snapped back to reality. Four spawn, one injured, stomped across the room at him. He had only a dagger. He dropped the dagger and wrapped his hands around a huge obsidian coffer. He heaved, lifting it up with pure martial fury, and slammed it down on the lead spawn's skull. The beast crumpled under the furious blow, crushed by the weight of the coffer and the strength of the dwarf. He lifted it again, and threw it this time. It spun in mid-flight, catching the second spawn in the maw. The spawn fell back, the coffer on its chest. He scooped up his dagger, and jumped at the third spawn, his dagger diving through its eye socket, gouging out that familiar eye. It bellowed furiously from its maw, and snapped at him. He stabbed again and again, finally piercing the thick skull and ripping its brain.

The last spawn bowled both him, and the slain spawn over onto a bed. He fell to one side as the enraged beast's claws ripped through the furniture to get at him. He jumped up, and scrambled past the spawn under the coffer, praying for enough time to retrieve his spear. He yanked the spear out of its hideous scabbard, and turned. Too late. The unharmed spawn was upon him, its jaws snapping shut around his arm as he turned. The armor held, but he could feel the crushing pressure of the bite breaking bones. His spear jabbed awkwardly into the side of its chest as he desperately went for the heart. It skipped off, once, twice. He felt his forearm bending unnaturally, heard the armor groaning. His spear dived in, gashing across the heart.

The awful strength of the bite relented, and the beast fell dead to the floor. His hand hung limply, and the trapped spawn finally got out from under the coffer. He sighed, and then growled at it, "Come on then, let me show you how to BREAK A SPEAR!" The soldier sprang forward, spear leading. True to his words, it ripped through the beast's chest, and snapped as it skipped off a rib, both pieces lodging firmly inside the monster. It almost grinned at him, and opened its hideous maw wide, wider, wide enough to completely engulf him. As it tipped forward, and its maw came hurtling shut, he heaved forward and up, over the upper edge of its mouth, and headbutted it right in between the eyes. The force of the blow pushed it back, and its maw snapped shut on open air. He headbutted it again, cracking both their skulls, then kicked its knee, shattering the bones. His good hand made a fist and crunched into the side of its body, snapping ribs, and finger bones, with the force of the blow. As it reeled from the surprise assault, he scurried to the side, and wrapped his good arm around the side of its neck, letting it buck him onto its back. He latched down on the back of its skull with his mouth, straining against the thick bones of its skull. Several of his teeth cracked from the pressure, but the skull also started cracking. The cracks in the forehead and the back both widened, and suddenly, insanely, its whole head crunched, halving its width, crushing its brain. The brutalized creature fell forward, dead. The exhausted soldier collapsed atop it, his good arm trapped underneath. As he passed out, he heard a voice, a wonderful, dwarven voice.

"By the blood god, look at what Urist Okablokum did to them!"

[[Talvieno's note: This was met with much applause. It might be useful to note that this is the point where the continuity snarl began to rear its ugly head. I'm going to untangle it for you to the utmost of my abilities.]]

## HANSLANDA:

Urist woke up in agony. His teeth and jaw muscles burned like fire. His arm was swelling up inside his armor, causing even more pain. And his forehead. Gods, this is what humans meant by 'a hangover'. He was on a stretcher, carried by two other soldiers, Melbil, one of his few friends, and Minkot, a swordsdwarf recruit from the last migrant wave. They were nearly running, careening through the halls, Melbil roaring for civilians to clear the way. They passed through the great dining hall, then

past the food preparation chambers, through the workshop levels, into the noble hall. Past the first two rooms, and into the hospital.

Urist could only think, 'Not the hospital. Please not the hospital. Let me die peacefully instead.'

They set him down on the first table. The hospital was empty of patients, only two doctors lounged about counting thread and cloth strips. The Chief Medical Dwarf came into the hospital right after the stretcher did, a small leather-bound book in his hand. He looked at Urist, muttering to himself the whole time.

"Hmmm... Broken arm, probably compound fracture, maybe a shatter... Lacerated forehead, probable skull damage... Let's take a look-see..." He poked the soldier in the forehead gently, and Urist screamed. "Almost assuredly self inflicted... Broken hand... Sprained wrist and ankles... Probable muscle strain or tendon damage from martial overexertion..." He smiled at Urist, then frowned suddenly, "Teeth?"

Urist bared his teeth, the gesture making his whole head re-ignite in agony.

"Um-HM! As I thought, three cracked teeth, jaw muscles overexerted. Liquid diet for five days. Doctors." The CMD looked up, and gestured at the two lounging doctor. They insolently ambled over, disinterested in the drama before them. "I want you to put a compress on his forehead, set his arm and finger bones, cast them up, and then put him in a traction bench when you're all finished with that for secondary treatment." They nodded, and went back to the cabinet of cloth. They began pulling out various implements to complete the operations assigned.

Melbil nodded at Minkot, "Go on, you should go get a drink. Bring back one for poor Urist here, one of the best. He deserves it. Six Spawn, laddie! That's a new record." Minkot nodded silently, and scampered off. Melbil turned to Urist, his crowded teeth showing in a wide smile. "They'll have you all fixed up right soon, boy-o! They been practicing on them capture goblins."

Urist could only nod without confidence.

Several agonizing hours later, he lay in the traction bench, with a cast on his left arm, right hand, a compress on his forehead, and two splints on each leg, 'For good measure' the CMD has assured him. Melbil was letting Urist sip from a mug of Sewer Brew, every so often giving him some water too. Minkot had returned for only a few minutes to leave the barrel and a couple mugs before vanishing into the corridor. Melbil was keeping up a rambling recollection of the battle with the magma crabs that had got the squad sent to the forges while Urist fought off the spawn.

"-And you know what Cap'n did then? Well, I tell you he kicked the blighter right in its face, sending it skidding back into the magma, and pulling the lever, sealing it back in the sea! And he turned to Obur and said-"

A stretcher came into the room, followed by the CMD. A trail of blood followed, spattering the floor. On the stretcher was a fat female dwarf, gushing blood from her throat. The Chief Medical Dwarf was pressing a shirt to her neck, and trying to prepare a compress with his other hand. The two bearers set the stretcher on the table, and dashed to the cabinet, pulling out thread and a needle. The CMD finally finished the compress, and the two dwarves dashed back over to him. He lifted the shirt, and they rapidly began sewing the vicious wound shut. As she lay dying, her head turned to face Urist, and she mouthed something at him as her eyes grew glassy.

Just as the two dwarves finished and the doctor slapped the compress on, she let out a death rattle, and fell limp.  
Melbil's face was grimly set, and he said one, horrible word. "Vampire."

## MR FROG:

### **Journal of Mr Frog**

Entry #3202

I've finally managed to recover this PEA. It was stashed behind a cabinet in Talvieno's bedroom -- she seemed like a nice enough girl, but there is absolutely no way it could possibly have wound up there on accident.  
I'm sure that this was all some kind of terrible misunderstanding, but, as I'm now facing a potential information breach of catastrophic proportions, taking drastic action would likely not be such a bad idea. Besides, I've been dying to test out the new truth serum I developed. It should be safe enough; my tests on the stray covies wandering around showed only a 2.5% rate of fatal neurological degeneration.

**Elsewhere, the following is written on some pieces of paper wedged between its owner's bed and his bedroom's wall; the penmanship is very shaky, nearly-illegible at some points:**

Entry #3205

The inbred little bitch *did* steal my PEA! All that sensitive material, and she just schmoozes her way in and takes it!  
I questioned her under the influence of the truth serum, and apparently she was acting under the direction of "Joseph", a reoccurring name which I would very much like to put a face to, if only so that I can ram a mug into it at relativistic velocities. Unfortunately, that's the only bit of useful information that I could extract from her - - either the serum was having severe side-effects on her cognition, or Talvieno's tiny mind is dissociated from reality to a staggering degree. She ranted on at length about how this Joseph had "magic powers", could appear and disappear whenever and wherever he wanted, and talk to people through "magic stones".  
From what I could gather, this "Joseph" had taken quite an interest in me for whatever reason, and had assigned Talvieno the task of stealing my PEA for whatever reason -- it's impossible to be certain what exactly he wanted it for, as there's all sorts of dangerous information in there (in retrospect, I should not have taken my work PEA with me). Apparently, she was supposed to quietly return it to me after he had extracted what he needed, but decided to keep it for some twisted reason -- with her deranged mind, she must have seen it as a memento of some sort, though the very thought of that headcase seeing me in that manner makes me want to vomit.  
Of course, Talvieno was now privy to far more classified knowledge than was conducive to her continuing to be allowed to exist. I would dearly have loved to

pump the bitch full of paralytics and dumped her rigid corpse in the magma sea, but as she was simply a more-or-less innocent pawn in this, I settled for merely knocking her unconscious (which took some effort; these dwarves may be small, but they're surprisingly feisty) and administering a large dose of amnesiacs. It'll probably take a while for her brain to piece her life back together, but the important thing is that she won't remember anything she saw on my PEA or any of her interactions with Joseph (and probably a significant amount of other things, but that's hardly my concern).

After dealing with Talvino, I checked under her bed on a hunch. As I had expected, Joseph had been communicating with Talvino through a PEA device (I suspect that this is the "magic stone" she had referred to in her ramblings).

I will find out who this Joseph is; be he some spook from upmanage, affiliated with some other entity, or working on his own, I will track him down and use whatever combination of violence and chemicals is necessary to extract answers from him. He won't be pulling strings from the shadows like a phantom for much longer if I have any say in the matter.

I'm not going to use my PEA anymore until I'm sure that Joseph didn't tamper with it. I'll just write on paper in the meantime.

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Entry #3207

The PEA I took from Joseph's bedroom had an incoming video call. I didn't pick up, though I did manage to trace its source (more on that later). I wanted to figure out as much as I could before tipping Joseph off that I know about his game.

Of course, that didn't matter, because several minutes later, the following message was sent to \*my\* PEA:

>Don't try to play hooky with me, Mr Frog. I know you're there.

Several seconds after the message was sent, another call came in on Talvi's PEA. I accepted that one; after all, it'd be very rude to ignore a call when the caller somehow already knows that you're present and capable of accepting.

The following is a transcript of that call:

\* \* \*

Mr Frog: Who are you? Why are you calling me? How did you know I took the PEA?

Joseph: To the first question... call me Joseph. I have a business proposition that I feel may interest you, Mr Frog. I'm afraid that it wouldn't be in my interests to answer the third question, however. Deepest apologies.

Fr: In that case, I suppose I'll have to figure it out for myself. What's this "business proposition"?

Jo: Quite simple, Mr Frog, especially for one with your résumé. I have a project. One that will allow us to uproot the evils in the world for good. But I can't do it myself. In fact, there's only one person who's capable of carrying it out. You.

Fr: Really? You need my help? Why were you sneaking around playing puppetmaster, then? Social anxiety, perhaps?

Jo: *[Chuckles and claps quietly]* Very droll, Mr Frog! But I'm afraid you'll have to wait for your answers. First, I'd like to discuss that corporation you worked for. I understand that you had some objections regarding its policies, correct?

Fr: What? Yes. I did. But how do you know? Have you been following me?

Jo: I make it my business to keep reasonably up-to-date information on those with power, as well as those with connections to those with power. You had doubts as to the morality of your work with the corporation, yes?

Fr: Yes. Yes, I did. Their funding did incredible things for my research, but some of the things they had me do were... horrible. It was for science, but... I don't know... It can't be right.

Jo: You questioned it, did you not? You questioned what you were doing. You questioned how things were, wondered if it was really how things should be. Through your questions, you found truth -- and that scared them, the people in power. The last thing any establishment needs is someone questioning its way. It destabilizes things, you see. Raises doubts regarding the validity of their authority.

Jo: What you did there still haunts you, yes? I can see the guilt in your eyes. You wish you could fix it, don't you? You wish you could take back the harm your actions caused.

Fr: Yes, but... I... I don't...

Jo: Which brings me to my proposal. I come offering a means to make something good come of what you did. Not only that, but I come offering a means to take down your corporation for good.

Fr: What are you talking about?

Jo: I'm talking about destabilizing things, uprooting entities like your corporation that have too much power and abuse it to their own ends. You would like that, wouldn't you? Imagine all the innocents your corporation took advantage of. All the people hurt and killed in the name of what they call science. Wouldn't you like to be able to make sure that they could never do anything like that ever again?



Fr: Yes. Of course! If there was any way to stop them, I'd do it. I don't care about the cost. They shouldn't be allowed to continue doing the things they do if there's any way to make them stop.

Jo: Exactly, Mr Frog! That is precisely what I'm offering. I need a force capable of striking down the most technologically-advanced entity in existence, and I believe that you can give me what I need. We have all the money in the world; all we lack is your skills.

Fr: Interesting. What do you need?

Jo: I need you to help me develop an HS-2 breeding and training program. Together, we --

Fr: What!? No! Absolutely not! The HS-2 are monsters! They ought to be destroyed, not deliberately made to multiply! What you're describing is insane!

Jo: I understand your apprehension, Mr Frog. The HS-2 were both your greatest creation and your greatest failure, depending on who you ask. But what I want to do is far grander than the destruction of a few worlds. For once, wouldn't you like your work to help the greater good?

Fr: How!? How could anything good possibly come of those monsters!?

Jo: Again, I understand your apprehension. The HS are weapons by design, and any weapon can be misused. But we are better than that. With the HS-2 at our side, all of those corporations and autocrats will finally have to answer to someone. Us. We will defend the helpless, tear down tyranny and build a brighter future on the wreckage. I only need your help.

Fr: I see. So you intend to blackmail everyone. Intriguing. So who do *you* answer to? Who stops you from abusing your power?

Jo: An honest question. Power corrupts most people so depressingly easily. But I am not most people, Mr Frog. I am... more-enlightened.

Fr: So your plan is to build a military dictatorship run by a madman with a god complex? Barring a miracle of staggering proportions, that almost certainly wouldn't be an improvement.

Jo: 'God complex'? Hardly. Not everyone is as weak as those in your upmanage, Mr Frog. Some of us are indeed capable of handling such power. Just have a little faith.

Fr: No! You're a lunatic! You talk about how terrible it is for people to have too much power, but your big plan is for you to be put in control of everything as though your own rules somehow don't even apply to yourself! I frankly wouldn't leave you in

charge of a shopping mall -- think of the innocents you could blithely harm!

Jo: *[Chuckles again]* Very good, Mr Frog! But, mock me though you may, you'll see the truth in my words eventually. My door's always open for when it does.

\* \* \*

I peeked at the PEA's internal memory banks, and the transmission's signal originated from outside the local spacetime -- in a spacetime bubble, I suspect. I don't exactly have a wormhole tunneler on me at the moment (blast these cavemen), so I suppose I'll have to figure out some way to draw Joseph out. A man like that can't possibly be good for anyone's continued safety. In the meantime, Joseph apparently having knowledge of my activities disturbs me greatly. I suppose I'll have to run a bug sweep. Manually. Better set some time aside, I suppose.

## HANSLANDA:

Several weeks after the deaths of the vampires, Urist was out of the hospital, all healed up. He hadn't been re-assigned to his old squad, the mayor had said he had a special assignment, so Urist had been left without anything to do, but dwell on the fact that he'd been friends with a bloodsucking undead for four years. Once all his squadmates had been drawn away to their duties, Urist retired to his room. He simply sat on his bed, seething in anger.

He stood, and paced through the small chamber. As he passed his chair, he aimed a light kick at the chair, sending it skidding across the room. That small action started an explosion of rage. Urist smashed in the lid of his oaken chest, threw his bed across the room, and tipped his cabinet over. After his rage played out, he turned to see the door to his room open, the mayor standing in the doorway, eyes downcast. "Yes, Mister Kineshtan?" Urist tried to scoot the ruined chest around his bed with his foot.

The mayor spoke without looking up, "I uh, got your orders scribed up from the Baron. He wants you to travel to the outpost of Spearbreakers and assess their strategic situation and report back to him. They're in a major Spawn danger zone, as well as on the border of the Mountain bandits' incursion lines. Plus, they're in a blood rain forest right next to a necromancer tower." The mayor sighed, "That sounded way worse than I intended it."

Urist smiled for the first time in a month, "Actually, that sounds... Perfect. When can I leave?"

The mayor stammered, obviously confused, "Um, I... Today. There is a caravan arriving later tonight, and you can go with them as a guard. We'll provide you with new equipment, seeing as how yours was highly damaged by the spawn. And since... Since you've redecorated, I'm guessing you don't have much to pack."

Urist nodded gravely. "Indeed, I haven't much. I shall prepare for the journey at

once."

And thus, Urist Okablokum began his adventure to the fortress of Spearbreakers.

**(Hanslanda):** For note, I've privately decided that [Urist] has AT BEST Proficient in his weapon skills, his civilian skills are cheesemaker, farmer, and butcher, and he has very few social skills, mostly intimidator and liar. He is muscular, narrow rust eyes, short hair and a long beard, both let free and left unkempt. His teeth (Barring combat damage) are evenly spaced. He has a low voice, a hooked nose, nearly fused earlobes, and untanned pink skin.

He is almost never sick, he heals quickly, and he is strong, tough, and slow to tire.

He has great spatial sense, average kinesthetic sense, but very low patience and a meager ability with social skills.

He is quick to anger, rather easily frightened, self-disciplined, and prefers routine.

## **MITCHEWAWA:**

**Year 205, the rule of Mitch**

**Chapter 13: Time rolls away**

It took me a while to realise, but I have been quite cut off socially from the rest of the fortress. Despite my popularity as overseer, I am only in possession of six 'passing acquaintances', and no friends. Fame is quite sad; seeing people smile at me in the hallway, with a nod and a hello, all-the-while not knowing much about me beyond, 'the guy that saved dozens of lives in medicine, revolutionised and streamlined the entire fortress and set up the entire military'. That title means more than my name. I think after this winter, I may retire. After all, there isn't much more I can do. All that is left for things to take effect is time; time for migrants to arrive to bolster production, time for the more vulnerable recruits to train, and time for Spearbreakers to realise my dream.

It shames me that I couldn't enact The Plan myself, though.

**22nd Moonstone:**



I don't know why, but for some reason I feel like making the barracks a kind and warming place. So I put a smiling face in there. And told everyone to only train within 3 square meters. Group hug!

The area where we fought goblins is starting to miasma, plus I found a necromancer tome. 'We see Deler Inkblushed, the asshole who ruined my day', written by Deler Inkblushed the Union of Assholes. It concerns how much of his ass remains un-kicked by us (none), the writing is fairly crisp and it has its moments of pop-up pictures.

### 25th Moonstone:

I cut two military squads in half, and made them into four. To help with training.

Also begun work on another personal project. This one isn't obscure; I'm just going to make a smoke chimney using a bituminous coal artifact bed. No biggie.

### 12th Opal:

The amount of idlers has gone up to 20. This is... beyond what I wanted. Work isn't being done. I'm going to install a giant statuary, that will give everyone something to do. While that is getting dug out, new policy; everything inside our walls is ours. Yep, it's time to drag all of that useless goblin armour and weaponry inside.

```
the Army Dwarf Mosus Bomrekigath is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf 'Painbrushturkey' Asënkan is sparring.  
the Raven is fighting!  
the human right hand is fighting!  
the Army Dwarf 'Miccolo' Logemzágod is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf 'The Master II' Delerdibesh is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf 'Kramar' Atírlulâr Oltarlâven Alâth is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf 'Feb' Sazirsebsúr Sezondumur Moldath is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf Stodir Udilâkum is sparring.  
the Army Dwarf 'Aseaheru' Zonduthnur is sparring.
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My new training regime is paying off; the men are forgoing the slow, ineffective 'combat demonstrations' in favour of sparring.

### 3rd Obsidian:

Time, rolling away like waves. I still haven't finished the statuary, or the chimney. And I only have a week to go. On the plus side, the monument has been completed.

[[Talvieno's note: This is the last of Mitchewawa's updates. Stormtemplar was skipped, and PaintbrushTurkey (often shortened to PBT) is next.]]

## TALVIENO:

### **From a shoddily-bound journal**

*This is a shoddily-bound journal composed of bits of a number of posters of covies. The edges of the pages do not line up. The cover is made of heavily-worn animal leather of an unidentifiable species. There is nothing etched on it, possibly because the owner feared the journal would disintegrate. The pages are unsigned and undated, save for a five-pointed star at the end of each entry.*

This is going to have to be my journal, as I don't really have the funds or means to get ahold of anything more extravagant. I made this myself, like I do most of what I own. I don't like scrounging in garbage stockpiles... It's sad that I've fallen this low; that someone with schooling could be so hard-pressed for a bit of coin that they would throw together a journal of old posters and write in it with a charred stick. But I miss writing, and drawing... and this makes me happy - so this is the best I can do.

It's a disappointing fact of any fortress, but you can see a "caste" system if you look for it. There's the "master class" - the higher nobility: barons, kings, counts and duchesses. Then below that, there's the "upper class": the mayors, sheriffs, captains of the guard, tax collectors and other such positions. Next are middle-class citizens: soldiers, miners, masons - anyone considered vital to the fortress but not holding a position. Then, there's the lower class... Those few that are recognized as members of the community, but are also considered expendable because they earn their living hauling furniture or cleaning pastures. I wish I could say I was part of that, but no... sadly, I'm one farther down. I'm in the "basement" class, as it's called: a poor girl that nobody notices simply because they choose not to. They don't *want* to see me, because it reflects on the state of their society. If they imagine no one is in rags, they feel the fortress is wealthier. People call us skulkers or vagabonds when they speak of us. A good example: the basement class ran the olden fortress of Boatmurdered - "into the ground", my old friend, Thalgor, would always add. That was before he moved up in the world and chose to ignore me. Nobody of the other classes is publicly friendly with a skulker. Well... apart from those who aren't right in the head.

I'm old enough to work, but nobody will give me a job, judging me by my clothes and thinking me unfit, or deciding I'm a slacker. Plus, it doesn't help that I'm a little shy sometimes. As a result, I don't really have a home of sorts. I mostly move around, staying in darker corners in different areas of the fortress. I have a few friends... it's not like I'm invisible. On occasion one of the cooks brings me something. He lost his daughter in the vampiric wars, and he's said I remind him of her. Sometimes he chokes up. I don't blame him... I lost my sister to disease two years ago. The doctors wouldn't treat her. "No coin, no service", they said. The doctors wouldn't have treated her anyway. They didn't used to treat anyone who was

sick, before Mitchewawa set things right. They'd occasionally perform operations on the healthy, though... which was how my sister became sick. If the basement class isn't careful, we become guinea pigs for experiments. Some think it's all we're good for...

I'm careful to stay clear of Mr Frog.

~~~

But I have something more important to write about than the current state of my life. Hopefully, someday, I'll leave Spearbreakers, and all its ungodly, almost idolized chaos. When I do I'll travel back to the Mountainhome. Maybe my Granpa will take me in again, and I can write a book. If it sells well, I won't have to worry any more. Among dwarves, writing is still considered low-class, but it's better than how I'm doing now. Maybe I'll travel to the human cities, but I don't know.

Three days ago I was hiding in a side hallway as Mr Frog passed by, and I heard a commotion in the room next to me. One of the voices sounded familiar, and I looked around on the wall for a peephole. Finally, standing on tiptoe, I found a small crack in the wall I could see through, where a dabbling engraver had carved too deep.

I was standing next to the hospital, and inside I could see the pudgy form of our old overseer, Talvi. I arrived after her term was over, but as I understand it she wasn't *always*... mentally challenged. She's always been kind to us, though, and we've always been kind to her in return. She was there for me when my sister died, for instance, and I was there for her when she found out about her covies. While over the past year she's been almost manically depressed, a few weeks ago she recovered, only soon thereafter to be found in the old garbage chamber, passed out. She'd been in a coma ever since, but interestingly, now, she was awake, and apparently in an almost murderous mood. It was funny, in a way. The doctors had pronounced her case hopeless, and it looked like she'd come to on her own. She was trying to leave the hospital, but a Dr. Kannan and a couple orderlies were keeping her restrained.

"Let me go!" she screamed. "I needa leave, you cain't keep me here!"

But Dr. Kannan shook his head. "No, my dear, I'm afraid you need your rest. It is good you're awake, but you should really be asleep. Hadhod, Grond - restrain her and get ready to sedate her." Dr. Kannan was the one who "treated" my sister before she got sick. I didn't like the dwarf.

His words met by loud protests. "No, you cain't! I'll have your jobs fer this, y'know! Don't you dare!" Talvi struggled to get away, but Hadhod shoved a gag in her mouth.

The doctor appeared done with the matter and turned to his assistant, shaking his head in disappointment. "Just five more days! That was all we needed. We were learning so much about science through my experiments! Wari, why is she awake? You medicated her like I requested, did you not?"

"Of course I did, sir," was the prompt response from the young woman, though *I* knew better. Wari is always shirking her duties to spend time with her lover. Being unnoticed lets you see things others don't.

Dr. Kannan was satisfied with her answers, though, and watched the two orderlies wrestle Talvi into a traction bed. Fearing for her life, I suddenly turned from the crack and called out, "Talvi is awake!"

As I listened to my voice echo through the little darkened alleyway and the cold stone corridors of the fortress, I hoped that I'd saved her. Within the hospital, the

dwarves froze for a moment, listening, before Dr. Kannan said almost frantically, "The needle! The needle! Sedate her!"

Several dwarves walked past the alley towards the hospital entrance, among them Splint and Fischer. They paid no heed to me, but looking back through the little crack I saw the door open and several dwarves pass through.

"Talvi! Glad to see you're awake," said Splint, with just the slightest hint of surprise, before looking suspiciously at the needle in Wari's hand, and then Dr. Kannan. "The good doctors had said you were beyond hope of recovery. Grond, remove that gag from her mouth and let her sit up." Grond looked like he'd been stricken helpless by the conflicting orders, but he finally obeyed Splint, the higher authority in the room. Talvi got to her feet again, the fire in her eyes dying a bit as she looked around, seemingly bewildered. She looked at Fischer in surprise, who gave a slight nod of recognition. Her eyes moved to those of Splint, and a confused look broke across her face. "Mister Splint, I... I..."

Behind Splint, Mr Frog turned and left the room, a satisfied expression on his face. Talvi watched him leave, then her face hardened and she walked to Splint, saying in a hushed voice I could barely hear, "Splint, I needa talk t'you in private." She grabbed his arm and pulled the surprised manager from the room.

Fischer glared heatedly at Dr. Kannan, who almost trembled in her gaze, before she turned and left. She looks like a guy, and she's every bit as scary as the meanest when she tries. One of the tales in the street is that she killed a barful of humans who, over their brew, joked about how she ought to have a beard. Judging on how pale Dr. Kannan was when he turned back to his assistants, I'm guessing he'd heard the same story. Fischer takes disrespect as a personal challenge, and she'd always hated Dr. Kannan for the poor treatment he always gave her soldiers.

I left my post at the little wall and followed Splint and Talvi down the hall, trying my best to keep to the shadows so they wouldn't notice me. None of the other dwarves rushing about their tasks did, but Talvi has sharper eyes than most, and she doesn't ignore skulkers like me - if I wanted to know what had happened to her, I would have to be quiet.

Finally she stopped just inside a little alleyway between the workshops and the stills. I'd always thought it was a bad idea to do the dusty task of stonecarving so close to the breweries, but everyone else seemed to think it made more sense. "After all," they said, "you can go get yourself a glassful of beer fresh from the still right after you carve your mug." It made little difference, really. There's hardly a corner in this fort that isn't cluttered with at least a few of the things. Someone suggested just last year we use them as a building material, and was taken seriously. Others talk in whispers of turning them into weapons and raining mugfulls of magma from the sky.

"Splint," Talvi began in a hushed tone, her sweetly high-pitched voice breaking through the damp air. I had to sneak forwards and hide behind a stack of mechanisms just inside the alley in order to hear. "Splint, it was Mr Frog."

I looked until I found a small gap to look through, between the gears and springs. Splint was clearly confused. "Talvi? What? What are you talking about?"

"Splint, as sure's a yellow fishbone eats vowels, Mr Frog is plottin' to take down th' fortress."

She looked dead serious. As it was Mr Frog she was talking about, I didn't have much trouble believing her. But Splint shook his head. "Talvi, you know I valued your opinion, but I just can't see Mr Frog doing anything shady at all. He's very up-front with me about his proceedings, and I work with him, too."

"Valued', y'say, Splint? Well, jes' maybes you oughta value it again, 'cause lemme

tell you right now, there ain't nothin' straight 'bout him!"

Splint shook his head again. "Talvi, he's a good dwarf - he's smart and loyal. We're good friends - I know him. Is this just about your crush on him? What did he do this time?"

Talvi blushed strongly but tried to brush it aside. "No, it ain't 'bout that, Splint. Mr. Frog ain't what he seems. He's workin' with the enemy. There's somebody named Joseph, and he talks to him, an'..."

"Talvi! Talvi! Listen to yourself. Joseph is your imaginary friend. Remember we talked about that? And your psychologist did too."

She looked confused, as if having trouble remembering, but then stammered,

"Well... I..."

"Wait..." The old overseer's brow furrowed as he thought. "'Valued'... you caught that?"

Talvi hesitated, but nodded.

"And the thing with the fishbones... You're saying those phrases again..."

Talvi nodded again, and Splint scratched his beard in thought. Talvi took advantage of his silence and spoke. "Mr Frog made me drink some stuff, an' I ain't thinkin' so jumbled no more now. He hit me, too..." The faintest hint of a tear trickled down her confused, bewildered face, and my blood boiled at the thought of Mr Frog striking Talvi. It didn't seem like him, I'll admit, but what did I know? I always avoided him. Splint seemed to have the same thoughts. "Talvi, I doubt Mr Frog would've hit you... but maybe he had you drink something intended to cure your... um..." he stopped, unsure how to put it nicely. "Anyway, I'll have a talk with him about it."

Talvi's eyes widened. "No, don't! Don't you dare! You keep this good'n quiet now, hear? I don't want him knowin'."

"But Talvi," Splint began, "it'd likely be smarter to -"

"No!" she interrupted in an almost fierce whisper. "You cain't. You ain't goin' to, neither. Promise me, Splint! Nobody can know."

Splint looked at her curiously, perhaps surprised at how she seemed at least halfway intelligent. Slowly, he said, "All right, Talvi... I'll trust you here... You have my word. But all the same, I want a detailed report on what you think happened... Come up to my place later and we'll discuss it." He walked away, saying over his shoulder, "And bring me a couple new mugs while you're at it. Mine keep ending up shattered on the wall..."

He walked past me, and I shrank back against the stacks of mechanisms as much as I could. He didn't even know I was there.

Talvi watched him leave, and then slowly began to walk out of the alleyway, humming something about bluebirds. As she passed, she did a double take, and her gaze rested on me. I was afraid she would be furious that I'd heard everything, but instead, she smiled lightheartedly, in a way that clashed eerily with her fierce mood only moments before. "Come with me," she said with a gentle laugh. "We've gots somethin' to do. I cain't do it on my own. Wanna be my wingcavy?"

I had to think on what she said for a moment. "Wingcavy" doesn't make that much sense to me, but I guessed it was akin to "wingman", an old phrase from when a second dwarf stood on the short, protruding "wings" of a battleyak chariot to protect the driver and cut down enemies the battleyak missed. After a few moments of looking up at her face, I whispered cautiously, "Does it have something to do with Mr Frog?"

The smile left her face and she looked at me with a glimmer of anger. "Oh, yes," she said matter-of-factly. "It has ever'thing t'do with... him." She said it distastefully, as if despising even the name. "Like the cheese on the wall said to the engraver, 'Why are you eatin' me in this bedroom and not yours?'" She looked at me solemnly for a

moment, before her expression gave way to happiness. "I like cheese," she laughed, extending her hand towards me.

I thought for a moment, and a hope crossed my mind - perhaps this was that opportunity my Granmomma always talked about, before she died. Maybe this would get me out of the "basement" and back into society... I didn't want to interfere, and especially not with Mr Frog, but all the same... I wanted out. I wanted to be accepted by people. I wanted to fit in.

I reached up towards her, and my hand was soon enclosed in hers as she pulled me to my feet. "Come on, now," she said, almost triumphantly, as she motioned for me to follow. "We's goin' where the covies go!"

☆

(Mr Frog): So now we'll have a crazy hillbilly chick squaring off against a devious bastard who's probably never been in an un'handicapped' fight since junior high. GENTLEMEN, PLACE YOUR BETS.

So why didn't the amnesiacs take this time?

(Splint): I'd say they may have worked in reverse due to her already being in a nigh blank state mentally. Plus she's drunk some pretty strange things out of Dorf! Mr Frog's mugs when he wasn't looking, so there may be some biochemical things that happened that weren't intended.

And I'll be honest, I gotta put my money on the tree chopping hillbilly mechanic, though Mr Frog has the prototype chainsword, so it may even out since he can cut up whatever the hell he wants with it.

(Bukitodinos): THE HILLBILLY CHICK FOR 10,000 DORFBUCKS!

(Splint): I'd say Talvi probably has sheer brute force on her side. Mr Frog the dwarf doesn't exactly strike me as the physically imposing sort and Talvi's been chopping down trees for years along with making mechanisms, though I'll be fair Mr Frog is probably far from unable to break someone's arm. Hell if they had to fight story wise it'd probably be two unarmored weirdos fighting with an axe and a handheld chainsaw..

(Hanslanda): I've actually got my money on Mr Frog. Chainsword>Axe. Also, he drinks carefully prepared poison to *calm his nerves*. But it will be very interesting to find out.

[[Talvieno's note: This became an actual debate.]]

HANSLANDA:

Nomen Erat Iohannes

He looked at himself in the mirror. He wasn't preening or admiring himself. He was frankly examining himself, alert for flaws, for weaknesses, for the truth. Instead, he saw a man. One of many men who could easily pass for a dwarf, which explained his upcoming assignment.

He was short, for a human. He was slender, but had wiry muscles. His eyes were the earthy brown of good dirt, and his hair was a darker chocolate brown. His beard was short, and well trimmed, a necessary part of his marginal disguise. He had a strong jaw, and high cheekbones, lending to an aristocratic appearance. Overall, he was somewhat forgettable, the kind of face that everyone has, and no one remembers. A tremendous asset for an agent.

He looked away from the mirror, and pulled on the roughly made tunic. He slipped a few small trinkets into his pockets; a small flimsiplast picture of his parents, a communication device, and a steel ring with a picture of the corporation's logo on it. Then he left his little room for the last time. Little did he know that this mission would be his last. Little did he know that he would be party to fell and terrible deeds within the coming weeks. His mission was a good one, to preserve the timeline of a specific fort in a specific dimension, to not allow outside agents to disrupt how things would progress. Such a task always sounds so easy, but with so many corporations sending out so many agents, in truth it was fundamentally impossible. Due to such things as the butterfly effect, an agent in a city on the other side of a planet could have a drastic effect on the events that were supposed to be preserved.

He knew this, and accepted that his task was far more difficult than most would believe. He was good at his job. He turned a corner, and opened a set of double doors into a conference room. Inside was six beings of various races, dressed formally, sitting at a conference table. Each being had before them a folder, containing the agent's profile, a description of the 'normal' timeline events expected from the mission area, and a cost-benefit analysis from Accounting.

The agent seated himself in the chair at the head of the table, and nodded at the beings before him. Suits. They were a necessary evil for the continuing operation of the company. He had become an expert at manipulating bureaucrats into doing what he wished and quickly. This mission briefing would be no different.

"So, Iohanne." Said the dwarf nearest to the agent, "This will be your one hundred thirty-second mission in your tenure here, correct?" The dwarf shuffled some papers around in the folder.

Iohanne, the agent, said, "That is correct, sir."

The being across the table from the dwarf, some sort of sentient with three eyes and oddly shaped hands, said, "Out of your completed missions, one hundred and twelve were successful, were they not?"

Iohanne nodded silently, no emotion showing on his face. The unsuccessful missions were no fault of his own, and the files said as much. The strange being nodded back, then said, "Do you believe this mission will have a benefit to outweigh the cost of transdimensional travel?"

Iohanne nodded slowly this time, and said, "If no unexpected circumstances arise, then yes. As you all well know, in my mission to Universe Kappa 12XM, I was assaulted by unlicensed operatives from an unknown source. I was forced to terminate them. Their bodies were found to unacceptably alter the timeline after

that, which caused several messy paradoxes. It cost us a lot. But that was outside my control at the time."

The dwarf spoke up, "Indeed. We know that. You are always under tight observation for exactly this reason, and your mission controller is under orders to inform you immediately of any operatives detected in your vicinity. This mission, we have detected one licensed portal, and at least two operatives. We have suspicions that there are nearly five operatives being deployed into this mission area, as it has been deemed to have tremendous significance down the line. We expect you to be able to eliminate all the enemy operatives and return their bodies here, to prevent the timeline from being affected."

Iohanne nodded gravely. "I am aware of the protocols. I also have decided on my methods. If you will give me a green light, then I will get started on my mission. I believe it will take no longer than three weeks to track down and eliminate all the operatives within Lokumokab."

A heretofore silent being spoke up. It, for its race was hermaphroditic, wasn't even vaguely humanoid, and as such, its chair was of an altogether different style. It adjusted thermal display sheets with tentacles, and gurgled in its strange voice, "Our approval is dependant on a single thing."

Iohanne cocked his head, and said, "This is not normal. What is it?"

The being gurgled what seemed like a chuckle, and said, "We must ask that you not glimpse the adamantine of this world. Our auguries of the potentialities of such a situation suggest such a glimpse would be your undoing, as well as the possible death of an entire iteration."

Iohanne narrowed his eyes, "Auguries? This word suggests omens and other such vague predictions."

The being shuddered fitfully, "You must either agree, or we will deny you."

Iohanne shrugged, "Very well. I will not gaze upon any adamantine during my mission. I still don't understand why you insist on this, but it is not my place to question."

The being went very still. "You are given approval of this committee. Proceed to portal twenty-one immediately."

Iohanne stood, and bowed gently to the committee, "I will not return until this mission is complete." Then he turned, and headed to the portal. His fate tempting words were ignored by the committee, who had already moved onto budget discussion.

Moments later, Iohanne stood before a transdimensional portal. He smiled at the technician operating it, a pretty human female. She smiled back, and said, "You will appear in a mid-level mineshaft, very close to the main stairwell. We've already located your first target, but he is very well entrenched, and a direct assault would be unwise. I recommend finding a cat's paw to use against him, some scapegoat to do the dirty work for you." She shrugged, "But I'm not the assassin. Good luck, Iohanne."

Iohanne gritted his teeth, and stepped through the portal.

[[Talvieno's note: Moved here from much later. EDIT: As is the post above, from even later.]]

SPLINT:

[ALERT-TEMPORAL DISTRESS CALL INCOMING. STAND BY....]

[DISTRESS CALL RECIEVED. CONNECTING, STAND BY....]

[CONFIGURING... STAND BY.....]

[BROADCASTING.]

- A human of possibly 5'8" or so appears on the screen. He is wearing equipment that is most definitely not period appropriate, among them a blood smeared suit of strange armor and a helmet with a gracked looking port. He appears shaken, and sounds of automatic weapons can be heard.

Sir! this is Recovery 2! Those bastards from Parasol were waiting for us at the DZ! I repeat, we have been ambushed! We've already lost nine men and three others are in critical condition! Jumpgate operator was killed and his portable gate got trashed, we need help! We have aborted the mission to retrieve an HS-2 specimen, as we cannot continue against this kind of resistance! I repeat, we cannot continue with the mission and are requesting immediate reinforcement and extrac-AUUGHR!

-Blood splashes across the screen as the human is struck in the head by something and the front of his helmet explodes outward, the remains mercifully slumping offscreen. then a thickly accented voice is heard shouting in dwarven:

"Come on, get these bodies up! We don't have long before that caravan passes through. And somebody trash that transmitter!" "What about the others? They left the wounded and bolted sir."

-Two dwarves, in similarly strange equipment are seen, and several shots heard, implying that the wounded have been shot. The two onscreen heave the dead human off the transmitter, one raising a foot and stomping on the screen, though a final phrase is caught by the transmitter before the machine is destroyed.

"Hunt them down, and kill them all."

[TRANSMISSION TERMINATED]

[PROBABLE CAUSE: TRANSMITTER DESTRUCTION.]

[RECOMMENDATION: DEPLOYMENT OF TEIR 5 RECOVERY TEAMS TO RECOVER OR DESTROY BALLPOINT TECHNOLOGIES EQUIPMENT IN ITERATION 458-023. LOADOUT TO INCLUDE ANTIPERSONEL ORDNANCE AND INCINDIARY DEFOLIANT PROJECTORS.]

[FACTOR OF CONSIDERATION: PRESENCE OF THE 'Nemian Private Security Corporation' (NPSC) FORCES UNDER PARASOL INDUSTRIES EMPLOY. FACTOR WARRENTS DEPLOYMENT OF IFV UNITS FOR SUPPRESSION PURPOSES.]

[AVILABLE INTELLIGENCE ON ENEMY FORCES FOR CONSIDERATION: NPSC IS KNOWN TO EMPLOY MORE FIREPOWER THAN NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH ANY MISSION, BARRING ASSASSINATION. KNOWN WEAPONS INCLUDE:]

[PI87HSW]

[PI23MAR]

[PI27IDP]

[BT150MAR]

[BT150AADS-MP]

[BT21SS]

[MELEE WEAPONS OF CONTRACTORS' HOMELAND ORIGIN.]

[LCC Mk. 32 IFV(S)]

[TEIR 5 RECOVERY TEAMS 3 - 9 ALERTED AND PREPARING FOR TRANSIT.]

[AST 1-3 ALERTED AND PREPARING FOR TRANSIT.]

[RECOVERY FORCE STRENGTH: 135 CONTRACTORS, EXCLUDING ARMORED CREWS. 9 IFV UNITS WITH EXPLOSIVE MUNITIONS.]

[ESTIMATED ENEMY STRENGTH: MINIMUM: 30 CONTRACTORS. MAXIMUM: 80 CONTRACTORS. NO ARMOR SUPPORT.]

[ANTIARMOR PERSONEL EXPECTED AMONG NPSC FORCES.]

[Ok, for the record all of the above weapons were pulled from my ass and represent the following

MAR - Magnetic Accelerator Rifle. The Dwarven railgun of our future will be based off the one made by Mr Frog's former employers, Ballpoint Technologies, since he has probably needed to learn how to use one properly for dangerous research missions he needed to go on personally.

HSW - Heavy Suppression Weapon. An LMG on steroids basically, requiring a harness of sorts to wield properly.

IDP - Incendiary Defoliant Projector. A good ol' hand-held flamer.

AADS-MP - AntiArmor Defense System, Man-Portable. A rocket launcher prone to malfunction, but easy to get as it's an outdated model.

SS - Sniper System. Don't need to go any further with that.

IFV(S) - An Infantry Fighting Vehicle meant to scare the living shit out of enemy troops and keep their heads down rather than kill them.

AST - Armored Suppression Teams. IFV/APC units.

BT - Ballpoint Technologies.

PI - Parasol Industries

LCC - Lernean Cybernetics Corporation.

SO pardon this abortion, I was bored. The view is as a technician in charge of monitoring recovery teams for Ballpoint Technologies.

(Splint): Well I did a bad thing.

Caravan - Urist's caravan

HS-2 Specimen - the BT soldiers were after one of the spawn that would ambush said caravan

See what I did there? But yes, there's fight that they're trying to keep out of view of locals. The key difference, is I've decided to paint Ballpoint as a front for a non-governmental military force, compared to Parasol who's using PMCs. Which is more effective is up to debate.

HANSLANDA:

The Journey

Urist didn't ride the wagons like the other guards. He walked point, leading the caravan from the most dangerous position. For most of the nights, they would circle up the wagons, start a fire, and camp. When they did, Urist would patrol the perimeter, far from the fire, deep in the darkness of the night.* The other guards make jokes about him, but the world wise merchants knew better than to taunt one with death in his heart.

Occasionally, Urist would eat, facing away from the warmth of the fire, staring into the night. On one of those occasions, a young hammerdwarf sat with him, holding a portion of salted pork and a quart of strawberry wine. For awhile, they ate in silence. Then the younger dwarf said, "So, why do you stay so isolated?"

Urist smiled grimly, "Friends die."

Silence, for a long time. Urist took another bite of his biscuit, washed it down with some milk. Another bite, and the sound of chewing.

"But everyone dies, sir. If you never get close to people, you won't have any kind of life." The young dwarf shrugged a bit, "Unless you don't want a life."

Urist sighed. "Listen boy, I've fought in the vampire wars. I watched a squad of dwarves slaughtered by a Giant Cave Spider and four cave crawlers. I've killed spawn in a six on one fight. I fought a pair of vampires from a traction bench with a scalpel. One was my best friend. And when I got out of the hospital, I learned my wife had decided I wouldn't be the same, so she left. Took our boy, went back to one of the Mountainhomes. Left me a note." Urist paused. "I had a life. It didn't want me. So now I'm looking for a good death, maybe I can balance the scales a bit. This Spearbreakers place, this sounds like exactly what I need. If I don't die there, then I'm going elsewhere. I'm walking the earth boy, I hope you never know what I mean by that." Urist lapsed into silence, and finished his biscuit.

The younger dwarf nodded. "Okay. Seems fair enough. Just so you know, I'm Sarvesh. I'll be around if you need anything." He finished his pork, and threw back the last of his wine. "See ya around...?"

Urist looked up, "Urist."

"See ya around, Urist."

Two days later, they reached the edge of the blood forest. It seemed a perfectly normal forest, until the dark clouds gathered, and let loose a mighty deluge of thick,

dark blood. It stained everything, seeping into clothes and coagulating in the creases of armor. The guards remained vigilant through the forest, knowing the old stories of vicious undead monsters, necromancers, and the ever-present threat of bandits. The travel through the forest was mostly uneventful, save for the final day. On the final day, Urist felt a familiar tingle in his beard, like that of static electricity. Without hesitation, he ran to the caravan, taking his spear from his back, bellowing a warning, "Spawn! Spawn of Holistic Detective! WARE! There be Spawn about!" The guards reacted swiftly, drawing their arms, taking up defensive positions. The four merchants pulled the wagons up close together, and drew knives and daggers from close at hand bundles.

Everyone was poised for action, no one moved for several long minutes. Silence reigned for long minutes, and finally one guard spoke up, "I thought you said Spawn. Where are they?"

A merchant snorted grimly, "Ever heard a forest be silent? Shut your booze hole and wait. They're coming."

They waited, and waited, and finally, shapes detached from trees to either side of the road far ahead of them. The spawn had been waiting in ambush, camouflaged against the blood soaked trees. There was seven of them, and they rapidly advanced on the waiting caravanners. The guards instinctively gathered at the front, tightening into a knot around Urist. The spawn spread out a bit, in a semi-circle, letting themselves have room to swing their long arms, and room to shake a dwarf around with their maw.

The spawn slowed as they got close, creeping closer, waiting for a sign of weakness or a flinch. An opening. One dwarf stamp-faked forward, trying to draw them in, and the spawn took it. With astonishing speed, they dashed forward. Urist was face to face with a spawn, again. This one was bigger, somehow even worse. Its eyes were a dead black, like a shark's, and it had barely any hair at all left on its whole body. Urist lunged, plunging his spear deep into its chest, doing no real damage to it, but distracting it from the next guard's attack. The next guard hacked at the other side of its ribs with his axe, breaking several, and deeply injuring it. Not that a spawn would notice. It kicked Urist in the chest, sending him rolling back, spearless. He stood swiftly, and drew his trusty dagger, circling the spawn, waiting for an opening. As he did, he watched the others battling the spawn. One group opted for a vicious method, going for its limbs, cutting everything off and finally shearing it in two with axes. The young hammer dwarf got a lucky blow in on his groups' spawn, breaking ribs and jamming them through its evil heart.

The axedwarf that was fending off Urist's spawn rolled back from a slashing hand, and Urist dived forward, under the arm, and tackled the overbalanced spawn in one fluid motion. It fell back, and slid a bit across the slick grass. Urist stabbed it frantically once, then again and again. Finally, its heart shredded, it stopped kicking and fighting and living.

Urist stood, and yanked his spear from the corpse. He turned to see another spawn bearing down on him. The axedwarf dived into it from the side, axe flailing violently. A limb was sheared off, and the spawn turned on the axedwarf, grabbing him by the abdomen and squeezing. Its' vicious claws ripped through his belly, spilling his guts. He stood shocked, staring at his insides, as it pulled him close and snapped its maw shut on the exposed intestines. He shrieked, and several other dwarves barreled into

the spawn, swiftly dispatching it.

The wounded dwarf fell down, babbling and bleeding profusely.

Urist grimly marched over to him, kneeling down by his head. The dwarf had tears in his eyes, and he was saying, "Do it do it do it don't let me be one of them. Don't let me turn. Kill me please. Kill me. Finish what it started."

Urist nodded grimly, and held his dagger up high, to be interrupted by a hand gripping his wrist. "No, Urist. Let Medtob do it himself. He's got the strength yet. It'd be better that way." Urist nodded, and handed the infected dwarf his dagger.

Together, with the young dwarf who'd spoken up, they lifted Medtob up into a sitting position, then standing. He held the dagger over his heart, closed his eyes, and said, "D-d-drop me before I lose my nerve." They let go of his arms, and he fell on the dagger, dying nearly instantly from the wound.

Urist turned to the young dwarf and said, "I hope one day, that I go out like that. Like a true dwarf would, in battle, or by his own hand rather than by mutation or decay or treachery. Bringing death to his enemies and life to his allies. Medtob is with the blood god now, laughing at the spawn."

The younger dwarf smiled, "I'd like to die in my sleep, or of alcohol poisoning. I guess overeating wouldn't be so bad either."

Urist smiled for the second time in a month. "I think I like your style, Sarvesh.

TALVIENO:

More from the Poorly Bound Journal

This is a poorly bound journal. All crafts dwarfship is of the lowest quality, at best. Several of the pages are half-falling out. The following entry is written with on a number of pages sporting a heavily faded "sad cavy" background, which it would appear someone attempted to scrub away with a sanding tool.

Nothing much has happened since my last entry. I tried to sleep, but couldn't. I'm still hiding behind some of the garbage heaps in the east room. The miasma is terrible, but I'm too afraid to leave, after what's happened, though I know that I'll have to, eventually. I won't eat these rotting scraps, not if I starve to death. But dear gods, the smell never lessens. You never get used to it... I've found a better cap than I was wearing, at least, over here in a pile: a nice-looking woolen knit beanie. I can't imagine why anyone would throw it out, it's only slightly worn. I always wear a cap of some sort, though I still let my hair hang down past my shoulders. Most dwarven women keep their hair up, but not me. Maybe some people see it as a bit of unjustifiable vanity, but it's just who I am.

It feels like I've been here for days. I miss my friends, if you could call them that. Most fortresses don't have more than one or two skulkers hanging around, but Spearbreakers has so, so many. The official census says the population rests around 90 or so, but in reality it's probably closer to 120, or even more. The additional 30 or so is made up of skulker dwarves like me. We're unusually thin for dwarves, because we haven't seen a good, hearty meal in days. Or even weeks. I'm thinner than most, though, and nimbler, too. I think that's maybe why Talvi chose me to help her on her quest, and not someone else.

~~~

After I'd lavished my curiosity with an eavesdropped conversation between Splint and Talvi, the first two overseers, Talvi told me to follow her, and I did without question. I trusted her, to an extent. She'd never really tried to trick me, and to be completely honest, I didn't think her capable of something like that. I know that's cruel to say, and I wouldn't say it to her face, but it's true.

As we passed through the hallways, we became intermixed with a large number of other dwarves rushing back and forth. Talvi looked over her shoulder with a smile and said, "Caravan's here." I nodded in response. I'd been wondering when the next one would come through. Mr Frog usually oversaw everything, so he would be outside. It wasn't that he wanted any more socks, like most of the other dwarves who would crowd around their wares (though he'd said once they made satisfactory test tubes in a pinch). No, Mr Frog was out there because few skulkers could resist attempting to sneak a bit of food or clothing from all that was lying outside... or at least, that was my opinion of why. After all, if you could get a full set of clothing, a good shower, and fix yourself up, you could pass as a lower-class citizen. People would make eye contact with you again. You might even land yourself a job, if you were lucky.

Talvi and I wove our way through the crowded corridors. The doors were almost always open when it was this busy, with so many people rushing through. They never even had time to close. It made things a lot easier, as we dodged workers carrying barrels full of mugs and mechanisms to the depot. I hated the chaos and crowds, but fortunately wasn't long before we reached the stairs, and we descended towards the housing level.

Minutes later, we were outside her door. "Come on in!" she said, as if welcoming a surprise guest into her home. It wasn't clear if she'd forgotten about me during our walk down the stairs, but I did as she asked.

She set herself down in front of one of her chests and began digging through it, looking for something. I approached cautiously, looking over her shoulder. The chest was full of little bits of paper, and she appeared to be searching for one piece in particular. I ventured a question, though a bit timidly. "What are you doing?" "Oh!" She turned up to look at me briefly. She always makes eye contact. I like that about her. "I'm jus' lookin' fer a key. I knows it's gotta be in here somewher'." I couldn't help but smile, and I nudged the little object to the right of the chest with my toe. "Is this it?" I asked.

Her face lit up and she gave a little clap. "Yes! That's it exactly!" She scooped it up in her hand and stood, walking quickly to the other side of the room. "I allus keep a special chest hidden over yonder, 'hind th' statue in my sweet cavy room's ear," she said over her shoulder, as she squeezed her way between the statue and the wall. It was an oversized statue of a dwarf, but I couldn't tell you who.

I had an easier time stepping behind the statue into the dark alcove than Talvi did, and found her rummaging through another chest, removing items and dropping them on the floor: an axe, a rope, string, a mismatched pair of socks, a shovel, a calendar, and a few other assorted items. She finished quickly, scooping them up in her arms and giving them to me. "You'll needa carry them, V, girl," she said in her southern drawl, with an almost blissful grin. "Jes' like how the parrot said to the bauxite."

Talvi always called me "V" - my first initial. I didn't like anyone using (or knowing) my first name, but that's something I'd rather not go into, even in a private journal... someone might read it. Talvi was one of the few who knew what it is, but she didn't ever use it.

As I headed towards the door, Talvi called me back. "Where you goin'? Get back here, we gotta do this right quick."

I stopped, confused. "But... didn't you want to go to Mr Frog's room?"

She shook her head and smiled what I would've considered motherly, had it come from anyone else. "There ain't jes' one way to the letter 'E'. Sometimes you have to travel with a smell in your nose." She turned and walked away. Not knowing what else to do, I followed, as she continued, "Learnt that one from a calendar page. Or... two that'd stucked 'emselves t'gether. It's a right good'un, I reckon."

Talvi got to her knees beside a chest and began pushing. I watched, carefully shifting everything around in my arms and trying to keep the axe from getting me.

With some effort, and a good deal of huffing and puffing, she managed to shove the chest aside, revealing a grate-covered vent shaft on the floor.

She stood up and brushed her hands off on her clothes. I envied her a bit about that. I've often wished I could have so little disregard for my clothing, but unless I want to go naked, I have to take as best care of what I have as I can. Not having socks or shoes is bad enough. But Talvi interrupted my musings. "You don't never wanna block them lungs on th' floor," she said, pointing at the vent, "but in this case, I done it anyhow."

Suddenly I realized what was going on and shook my head violently. "No, no no. I'm not going in there. You can do it by yourself, I can't go in."

"Sure ya can, it's just as easy as puttin' one foot ahead of th' other, V. Pretend you're a cavy, like I is." she said nonchalantly as she slid the grate to the side. I'm not sure how she didn't notice my widened eyes or quickened breath, but she didn't.

I suppose now would be a good time to explain that I'm terrified of small spaces. It's not quite a phobia, but I always get the feeling that everything is going to crush down on me and kill me. It's not a good fear for a dwarf, I know, and especially not a skulker, but I'm a special case.

She got down on her hands and knees, and just barely managed to squeeze herself inside. I couldn't imagine how there could possibly be enough air in there to breathe. I stood paralyzed in fear, hearing in the back of my mind the sound of the former overseer calling to me... I didn't want to move, but swallowing I forced myself down to my knees. I hesitated in front of the blackness, away from the flickering torchlight, but finally moved in, carrying the bundle of goods beside me in one arm. I didn't care so much about the dark. Just the tight space.

Farther along, the passages grew large enough to stand inside. I don't remember much about any it now: I was scared out of my mind and hyperventilating most of the way through the dark passages, with nothing audible but the sound of my breath, Talvi's shuffling along, and my rapid heartbeat. I once got up the courage to ask where we were going - she made my hands start shaking with her response. "I dunno, V," she said, almost in tears. "This's where all my covies went afore they's disappeared." Her mood swing to melancholy wasn't helping my morale.

Finally she stopped, and I ran into her. "What happened?" I asked in fright. "Somethin' don't smell good," she said. I listened as she knelt and sniffed around - yes, sniffed, like a dog. After a moment, though, she stopped, and I heard a spring

snap, followed by a sharp clatter of metal.

"What was that?" I asked.

A couple tense minutes passed before she responded. "It's a dart," she said. "It's got Mr Frog's cavy poison on it. Wanna touch it?" she asked innocently.

After imagining impaling my finger on a sharp object in pitch blackness, possibly laced with a deadly poison, it wasn't hard to decide to pass. "I've got my hands full," I replied as an excuse, and listened as she placed it back on the floor. "Miss Talvi, we can't go through here if he's put up traps." I said, trying to reason with her addled mind. "It's like he expected someone to come through. And where does this stupid passage lead, anyway?" I wasn't in a good mood. I just wanted out of there.

"Cain't you smell it?" she asked in surprise. I shook my head. She saw, despite it being pitch-black, and said, "It's Mr Frog's bedroom."

"We'll have to go back," I prodded her verbally, and she finally, finally agreed.

Later we stood in her apartment, brushing dust off ourselves.

Talvi seemed in a good mood, despite the failure of her mission. "His door'll be locked now, I reckon. We'll have to wait 'til nightfall - he don't allus remember to lock it."

"What, we just go in there while he's inside?"

"No, I'll chew the door a tad in a couple o' good places while he's asleep. He won't e'en know it ain't locked when he leaves tomorrow mornin', 'cause I'm a skilled biter. You come 'round with the birds, an' I'll let ya' in. We'll go t'gether."

I finally decided she meant to come by at sunrise, getting up when the birds did, because nothing else made much sense.



## HANSLANDA:

### **Arrival**

Urist was walking point the day after the spawn attack when he saw the primitive dirt road that marked the very edge of the outpost Spearbreakers. He stopped, and waited til the caravan had come within easy earshot, and spoke, "I think we're about there. The above land seems quite worked over, if you look past the blood."

The lead merchant nodded, "Aye, I think you're right. Everyone keep your eyes open, we're still in the woods, but now we might get help if an ambush occurs. Let's keep the pace up."

The small troupe kept going as they had, coming up on a hill from the south. The base of the hill had been carved out, and walled off, while nearby a small tower stood. On the top of the tower, a tiny figure waved, then lit a torch. On a part of the hillside, farther east than the walled section, another pair of torches lit up. The lead merchant sighed. "Last time I came here, we entered that walled off section. I'm guessing something's changed since then. Head toward the torches, I believe they want us to go there."

The wagons turned, trundling at their steady pace to the now-visible tunnel in the hillside. About halfway there, the figure on top the tower began gesticulating furiously, and lit another torch. The figure began waving the two torches frantically.



The lead merchant sighed again, "I believe that means nothing good. Boys, gear up. I think we got foes about."

No soon had he said this, then the foes became visible. A shambling horde of undead of various races was making their way toward the caravan. A figure followed them at a fair distance, wearing long flowing robes. One of the other guards grunted, then hollered, "Necromancer."

The figure on the tower had been joined by another, and this one also lit two torches and began waving them. Urist snapped, "Bloody feckin' hell, it was all waiting for us, eh?"

On the other side of the caravan, mountain bandits were swiftly loping toward them, only about ten, but now the dwarves were flanked on two sides and outnumbered even further. The merchants whipped their beasts of burden harshly, forcing more speed from them, as the guards split in two groups on either side.

The mountain bandits arrived first, sprinting the final stretch of distance into the small squad of dwarves facing them. Urist was with the group, at the extreme edge. The mass of bandits dove into the dwarves in a packed unit, fighting ferociously but individually, more like duelists than soldiers. The dwarves fought as a group, each one supporting his fellows, exploiting openings on distracted foes, while the bandits were like islands in a storm. Each stood alone, and fell alone, felled by the group of dwarves. Two of their number dashed past the cordon, at the merchants, gunning for the weaker targets. Urist and a macedwarf followed them swiftly. Just a few feet from the wagons, the dwarves caught the bandits, diving into their knees nearly in unison. Urist fell atop the bandit's legs, who aimed several ferocious kicks at Urist. The kicks bounced off Urist's helmet and pauldrons, so Urist grabbed on of the corrupted man's knees and locked it, pulling him closer as he did.

The other dwarf had forgone any hand-to-hand combat, and instead was smashing his mace into the lower half of the bandit, crushing bones in his legs, hips, and lower back. Urist pushed his bandit's calf down, and pulled his thigh up, bending his knee the wrong way, accompanied by a hideous crackle. The man screamed in his guttural language, and kicked again, but with less force. Urist jabbed back with his spear, the spearpoint catching the man in the groin. Another scream, and Urist stood, pulling out his spear as he did. He hopped onto the man's back, and impaled him through the back of his chest. He heard the man wheeze and gurgle as his lung filled with blood, and looked over at the other dwarf.

The macedwarf had, unnoticed to Urist, gotten struck by the crippled bandit. He was gushing blood from his right arm, and his mace lay on the ground. He backpedaled, then tripped over a large stone, falling on his back. The bandit crawled toward him, sword in hand. The dwarf kicked the man in the face, but the man struck back, deeply gashing the dwarf's leg.

Urist dashed over, and stabbed the man in the body, his blow a mirror of the strike he had performed on the other, now dying bandit. This man rolled over as he withdrew his spear, the sword in the bandit's hand flailing violently. It hacked into Urist's side, bouncing off a rib, leaving a superficial wound. Urist snarled, and stabbed again, hitting the prone man in the throat, ripping it open. Blood sprayed, and the man dropped the sword to grab his ruined throat.

Urist turned to the macedwarf, heedless of the blood oozing down his side. The macedwarf lay panting, bleeding profusely from his wounds. His face was pale, and

he seemed near unconscious. Urist tried to pull him to his feet, but the other dwarf waved him off, "Leave me... I'm not getting up again. Get the necromancer before he can raise me." Urist nodded, turned to look at the dwarves in his 'squad'. They had turned back to the caravan, leaving the slain bandits behind them.

Urist didn't see it, but the necromancer grinned, and waved his hands in an intricate gesture. All the dead bandits rose to their feet behind the dwarves, and advanced once more on the caravan. Urist saw the raised corpses, and yelled at the dwarves, "Turn about! Undead, they're undead!"

The dwarves turned, seeing the threat so near, and charged into the shambling ranks of mutilated corpses. Urist looked to the other squad, but they were locked in mortal battle with the other group of zombies. He growled, looking for the robed human. And saw him, between the zombies and the tower with its pair of tiny figures atop it.

Urist ran past the melee of undead and dwarves, toward the necromancer. The human saw him, his grin disappearing at the sight of the bleeding, gore encrusted dwarf in full battle armor charging across the flat expanse of land directly at him. The necromancer turned and ran toward the hill.

It proved to be an unwise decision moments later when a swarm of dwarves spewed from the tunnel like an army of ants. They were clad in armor, some even clad in the bright blue of adamantine, that most valuable of metals, and held spears and pikes. They split into several groups, two heading for the melee around the caravan, and a smaller group sprinting for the necromancer.

The human stopped at the sight them, and turned back toward Urist, figuring one dwarf was better than five. He hoped to evade the dwarf, and flee back to his tower, but Urist had other ideas. Urist stopped, a good distance away, and when the necromancer tried to change direction to pass him by a fair distance, Urist ran the way the man had turned, cutting him off. The mageling cursed when he saw this, and sprinted right at Urist.

As he neared the dwarf, Urist charged back. Just as they were about to connect, Urist stopped, sidestepped, and held his spear out sideways at a forty-five degree down angle. The human wasn't swift enough, and tripped over the spear, smashing his face against the bloody dirt. He rolled sideways, dodging the stab Urist half-heartedly aimed at him. As the human stood, he saw the reason for Urist's negligence.

The other five dwarves stood in a semi-circle around him. The human stammered, and tried to speak, to worm his way out of this, but the leader of the squad rammed the pike she carried through his chest, lifting him up with furious strength, then bearing him down into the ground, violently impaled. He gasped, and struggled vainly, but then all the dwarves started stabbing.

It was over quickly. Urist turned to the leader of the squad and said, "I thank you, I fear I wouldn't have caught him without your help...?"

"Fischer. Colonel Fischer, of the Pikes of Spearbreakers. I am pleased to meet you, sirrah." She spoke bluntly, and he accepted the minor insult with equanimity.

"And my caravan thanks you as well, they would have been... Sorely pressed, to put it lightly." He nodded deferentially at her as she brushed past him.

"Yes, well let's get them inside before the spawn smell the gore and come running. The spawn around here are stronger than most, and I think they're getting worse.

Hurry up, sirrah."

With that brusque exchange, Urist Okablokum arrived at Spearbreakers in fine Dwarven style, violently, unwelcome, and coated in blood.

**(Hanslanda):** Urist McKillsThings has been happy to talk to someone lately. He has admired a tastefully disassembled necromancer lately. He is happy to have saved a caravan lately. He has taken joy in repeated and continuous slaughter lately. He has admired a fine wagon lately.

[[Talvieno's note: All Iohanne entries were written much, much later.]]

## HANSLANDA:

### **Iohanne Est Valde Periculosus**

Iohanne appeared in the pitch black tunnel, crouched and perched on the balls of his feet and his knuckles, muscles tensed. He had been dropped into too many ambushes to not be prepared for another one. Luckily, the mine shaft was devoid of life. Sounds echoed around the corner ahead of Iohanne, sounds of dwarven voices, steps, and mining.

Iohanne glided forward silently, and peeked around the corner. The glow of torches cast shadows around another corner, and Iohanne crept up to the lit hallway. He repeated his earlier glance around the corner, and saw a grand spiral staircase disappearing up out of sight, and down into the depths. It seemed to go on forever, but Iohanne knew that it was exactly one point five-six kilometers to the top step from the very bottom of the dug out spaces.

He adjusted his outfit, messily scrunching it up, then patting dirt into the elbow and knee fabric. He mussed his own hair, and walked up the staircase. No dwarf passed by for some time, and when one did, the dwarf didn't give the assassin a second glance, so well did he pass for a dwarf.

Iohanne thought of what his first move would be. The technician had been correct; his initial target was too well entrenched in the workings of the fort to be directly assaulted. Iohanne must seek out someone who could kill the target for him. Then he could move on to the others with impunity, as the distraction caused by such a high profile death would be quite sufficient for an assassin of Iohanne's skill to exploit for a few more murders.

Iohanne entered the living quarters of the fortress, and heard the baying, screeching, and shrieking of Spawn. He grinned humorously, and followed the noises into a small complex of tightly sealed cells. He looked through one of the windows at the captive Spawn. Such magnificent killers. Perhaps he could exploit their natural ability for death to take out his target.

Iohanne pondered this while he explored the fort more fully. He had maps memorized, of course, but nothing is better than on-site examination. He listened discretely to the gossip of the fort. A caravan was nearing. Dwarves had been dispatched to help guard it against the undead prowling the surface. Minor rumblings about who the overseer would be. Every scrap of information could make or break his mission.

Iohanne was there to watch the caravan arrive. Many dwarves vomited forth from the fortress proper with goods to trade, and Iohanne scanned the swarm, looking for someone strong and lethal enough to do the deed. He spotted a certain caravan guard, who seemed isolated from the others.

Isolated, strong, skilled with weapons. A perfect candidate.

Unnoticed in the crowd, Iohanne slipped close enough to brush a tiny dust-speck sized tracking device onto the dwarf, then slipped away just as quickly. He returned to the inside of the fort, and wandered until he found a sufficiently secluded area to make a communiqué.

"Agent, this is Command Actual, over." Said the brusque voice of his controller after he keyed the transmit button.

"This is Agent Actual. Confirmation code is Delta-651, over." Iohanne eyed the corridor he was in tensely as he spoke.

"Agent, code accepted. Make your report, over."

"Agent Actual has selected an individual to carry out proxy-mission, and requires mind-altering substances suitable for short term domination in a secure dead-drop within the next four hours. Over." Iohanne waited an interminable amount of time after saying this, waiting for the response. Finally, it came.

"Command Actual has approved. Dead drop will be in pre-arranged location. Does the Agent require coordinates?"

Iohanne smiled grimly, "Agent Actual requires no coordinates. Out." He turned off his communication device, and turned it over to check the tracking display. It showed that his selected dwarf was moving at normal walking pace in the bowels of the fort, so all was well.

The plan was coming together.

## SPLINT:

More of the deranged crosscontinuitytimetravelingdimensionhopping fun, featuring most prominently here, a Ballpoint Tech Contractor named Ecem, leading the recovery forces sent to recover or destroy anything left by the mercenaries at attacked Recovery 2.

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Ecem ducked low in the bushes as he and his team approached the road. It was well worn, made from more-or-less smoothed boulders. "Everyone down! I got eyes on a caravan, dwarven." He said quietly into his comm. "Right on schedule. They going to be passing the battle site?" came a response. "Nah, negative. It's at least another two or three kilometers out. R2 was supposed to get some specimens that were in the- Oh damn! They're closer than I thought! Quick, roll the Octavias back and kill the engines! Everyone switch to optic camo!" Ecem hissed, the sounds of dwarves talking slowly becoming audible. "Wait for them to pass...." After several minutes, the wagons had nearly trundled down the road out of sight when there was a great commotion from somewhere up ahead.

"Team 5, I want a sit-rep. Anything we need to worry about?" Ecem said quietly, to eliminate the off chance the dwarves at the rear might hear him. His comm crackled to life, a woman's voice on the other end. "A small HS-2 warband. Should we engage and try to get a specimen?" "No, the caravan isn't our problem, and a specimen is not what we're here for." He said, his voice lacking any discernable emotion. "But we can't just let them die!" came another soldier's voice. "They'll be fine. Stand by." Ecem shot back.

True to what he said, the dwarves more or less (save a few guards) survived and continued on out of sight, though they had taken time to bury the dead and make crude headstones from some pitchblende blocks. "Team 5, we good?" Ecem asked, his voice returning to a normal volume. "Yeah, were' clear." Came the woman's voice. "Alright, fire the engines up. Let's go, Watch out for traps." To an observer, it was strange to see a bunch of metallic monstrosities roll out of the woods across the road, strangely armored and armed men and women crossing alongside. But, save the giant holes in the foliage the machines made, it was as if they'd never been there once they crossed. They kept going for several hours, moving slowly to avoid being ambushed like their colleagues when they found the remains of several Ballpoint Tech contractors laying in a large natural clearing, indifferent from any of the countless others they'd seen since they arrived.

"Oh man, this is just wrong..." A man said, seeing a body missing a leg and an arm and the midsection having been torn open. "The HS-2 do this to them?" He said, turning to Ecem. "No.... No too clean a cut on the wounds. Must've been one of those mercs." He said, turning the body over. "No tags. Gonna have to DNA test him for ID. Get him in one of the Octavias." He said, motioning for two contractors to get the dead man's remains, one of which was up in a tree. "What about others?" he said to no-one in particular. "Three more bodies boss, two with ID, two without. One's head is missing," came a reply. "Alright, check around for that head and load up the remains. Anyone have any idea how far out we are from the Objective?" "Another fifteen minutes at current rate sir." A man said through his comm. "Not to sound paranoid, but anyone else get a feeling we're being w-" a contractor by one of the IFVs was cut off by several Mag-cel rounds to his chest, followed by an explosion that destroyed one of the other machines. "AMBUSH!!!" Came a call as muzzle flashes lit up the forest. In a matter of seconds, another dozen of BT contractors were dead or dying and another IFV was destroyed.

"Movement! Right flank! Omega 3-2, light those fuckers up!" Ecem shouted into his comm as he leveled out on an NPSC rocketeer, squeezing off four slugs, which all hit his launcher. The weapon was known to malfunction, but the old model exploded catastrophically, sending three more hostiles flying in bits and pieces. That was far worse than what he'd been told by longer employed contractors. "Well... I guess that's why we don't use those ones anymore!" Someone said on the comms, obviously trying to lighten the mood.

It wasn't working.

The IFV called on earlier did as it was told, its autocannon roaring to life as it spat several explosive 20mm rounds into the trees on the group's right side, sending smaller trees crashing down and blowing out chunks of larger ones. If an elf had been there he probably would have been sent into a frothing rage. The distinctive sounds of railguns firing didn't seem to want to wane, the remnants of Team 6 being killed to the last when the members of the group were killed when a third IFV was destroyed. Ecem was in the middle of reloading when several mercenaries rushed out of the treeline armed with axes, swords, and a few flails. They were mixture of dwarves and humans, many with blood still clinging to their weapons. "Fuck! Left side! Assault troops left side!" Ecem shouted into his mike, barely loading his weapon before a human with a sword was on him. He managed to parry the sword strike, but was thrown to his back in the process, causing him to draw his meager handgun in an effort to defend himself. He swung the gun up and fired of several rounds, but it wasn't enough to keep the man from slashing him across his midsection, tearing several layers of tissues and rending his lower armor, but thankfully nothing spilled out when the lifeless aggressor fell on him. Ecem pressed his weapon to the fallen soldier's head and fired, blowing a hole through the helmet and ensuring that he'd stay dead. He pushed his enemy off, seeing that two dwarves and three humans had been gunned down, while a dwarf grappled with one of his own team members, two others behind the dwarf laying lifeless, one with an axe embedded in her chest the other with a shield jammed thoroughly in his helmet and likely his skull. Ecem leveled out his handgun as best he could, given the excruciating pain he was in, and fired off five rounds. While the first three missed horribly, the last two both struck the dwarf in the upper body, causing him to cry in pain before he was knocked off balance and shot in the head three times, reducing the majority of his head to a stew bowl and his helmet to scrap metal. The ally he helped waved in thanks before continuing to fire into the trees as a jet of fire connected with the foliage somewhere further away, complete with screams as enemy combatants came rushing out on fire, only to be blown apart by an IFV's autocannon.

Ecem lost consciousness after that, the sounds of gunfire and screaming seeming to fade away as the world turned black.

## HANSLANDA:

### **Realization**

The merchants were busily unloading their wagons, while the native dwarves were carting bin after bin of mugs to the depot. Urist had never seen so many mugs in all his life. Mugs of dacite, obsidian, chalk, hematite, gneiss, and orthoclase. Mugs elaborately decorated, and plain, functional mugs. Mugs menacing with so many damned spikes they looked like sea urchins, and mugs with hanging rings you could make chain mail from. Mugs with a thousand small, finely cut gems, and mugs with a single huge cut gem on either side.

Urist stood, jaw agape at the stream of mugs. A swaggering dwarf stopped next to him, his hands on his hips, his chin jutting out in a most presumptuous manner.

"Beautiful, aren't they?"

Urist nodded, "You folks sure love your mugs."

The other dwarf laughed, throwing his head back dramatically, and tossing his coiffured hair about. "You have no idea. We have so many mugs, we've begun the weaponization process. Soon, our enemies will drown in our mugs. And their own blood. Mostly their own blood, really, but there will be mug involvement."

Urist examined the fellow closely, nodding skeptically. "Yeah, well, I need to go talk to Colonel Fischer. You... You have fun. I'll see you around." Urist walked away from the other dwarf, shaking his head in incredulity. What a wacko.

A slim, oddly tall dwarf came around a corner, an angry grimace set on his face, bumping right into Urist. "Hey, watch out." He said it without emphasis.

Urist nodded back, and said, "Would you happen to know where Colonel Fischer would be? I need to speak to her. Him. Her."

The other dwarf sighed, "Fischer huh? Didn't peg you for her type, but whatever. To each his own." The strange dwarf sipped from a small flask, and his eyes dilated wildly as he smacked his lips, "Oh shit, that's the good stuff." A grin crept across his face, "Uh, Fischer. Right. Fischer. Um, she'd be in the armory, but you'd have better luck talking to Splint, or maybe Mitch. Or Storm. Storm just got elevated," He chuckled, "Heh, elevated. Er, to expedition leader. But Mitch just finished his term, so he has a better idea of what's happening in this blighted hellhole of a caveman's wet dream. Er. Fortress." The dwarf looked at Urist suddenly, like he was remembering the other dwarf was there. "Oh shit, did I say that out loud? Nah, he doesn't know anything Froggie. Yeah, go to one of them."

Urist was gaping again. What. The. Fuck. What was that dwarf drinking? Were they putting wood alcohol in the booze here or something? He said, "Thanks, uh... You. I'll let you get back to... Whatever it was you were doing."

The strange dwarf smiled, and started off at an ambling stumble.

Urist wandered down the hallway, past several farms, a pasture full of... Emus?

Okay, that's not so strange, they're big, and kinda tasty. He kept walking, coming to the stairs. He went down, bustling dwarves passing him on all sides. He got off the staircase and entered a dining hall. It was a nightmare of activity. Animals barked and growled and meowed and skittered under foot and left presents everywhere. Dwarves were cleaning furiously, keeping the place at a relatively tolerable level of mess. There was scads of mugs on every table, most half full, some empty. In the corner of the dining room was a huge pile of mugs. The cacophony proved too much for Urist, and he retreated, down a level again.

Looked like a standard 'apartment' level. Thank god, something that made sense in this labyrinth. Little hallways with dozens of rooms connected to them marched off into the distance, out of Urist's eyesight. A female dwarf exited a door to his left, and smiled as she saw him. She seemed a bit distant, but greeted him politely enough. "Hey there lil fella. You from the trade caravan? I heard we were getting one, but I kinda thought the spawn and undead would get them first. Darn spawn taking all the pretty gifts you good folks bring." She smiled again, like she hadn't just blatantly told him that most caravanners were butchered and their corpses plundered. "Them spawn ain't like my precious covies, so cute and precious." She hesitated and her



smile faded, "Have... Have ya'll brought any covies? I dearly miss mine. I... They're around here somewhere, I know it." She choked up, "Excuse me, I have to go."

Urist barely managed to stop her, "Wait, where is Mitch? Or Splint?"

She smiled, her mood whiplashing from near tears to blandly happy in an instant, "Oh, them? Hmm... Mitch would be... Check the tower, I bet they were up there guiding ya'll in. They're sweet like that."

Urist nodded, smiling, "Thanks, I'll do that. Have a nice day."

She nodded distractedly as she went up the stairs. Urist sighed to himself. Okay, hopefully he'd met all the crazy bastards this fort had to offer, and the rest he had to deal with were a bit less... Unhinged.

He found his way to the entrance to the tower with directions from a very quiet but polite dwarf who seemed very nervous to be talking to him, and just as he came up the stairs, two dwarves were coming down them.

They stopped on seeing him, and nodded a greeting. Urist let out a silent prayer, and spoke, "Hello, I'm looking for Mitch. Or Splint, I guess."

The dwarves shared a look. One spoke up, "Why?"

Urist stammered, "I uh... My orders are..."

The other dwarf examined him carefully, "Orders from whom?"

Urist pulled out his order, unsurprisingly illegible from being drenched in blood for nearly a week. "Uh, the Baron of-"

The first dwarf snatched the papers, "Right, lemme see. Mmmhmmm. Right... Okay."

The two shared another look. The first said, "I'm Mitch. This is Splint. I'm nobody special, but he's the manager and broker now, so I'll let you talk to him. If you need any... Clarification, come see me in sublevel nine, section twenty-three, I'll be in the fifth room down the ninth hall." With that, he dashed off, on whatever business he had.

Urist smiled at Splint. Splint didn't smile back. He said, "So you're here to review our strategic situation and determine what, if any assistance we need holding back our three fold threat?"

Urist was dumbfounded, "Yeah... I... How did you...?"

Splint kept going rapidly, "I've been bookkeeper here for nearly seven years. I've been reading blood-soaked pages the whole time. Our military is strong. We've had plenty of practice fighting spawn and undead, but oddly, not a whole lot of mountain barbarians have come through here. Guess they aren't that stupid. We have a standard pattern trap corridor set up, we had to after our main entrance was compromised by the spawn. We'll get to that later." He grinned, finally. "We also have a Spawn Research Center set up."

Urist couldn't keep up. He waved his hands in front of him, "Wait, wait, wait. YOU didn't even LOOK at the page. You weren't even making sense there... Like, it was just words coming out of your mouth. Go back to the military bit, and let's start there. And go slow."

Splint sighed, "Right, to the barracks then."

**TALVIENO:**

### **More from V's Journal**

*The following is an excerpt from the poorly crafted journal of "V". These salvaged-poster pages boast of a peculiar smell, and are marked in places with colored ink. At the bottom of the entry is a five-pointed star in charred stick.*

I can't say I liked her plan, and I especially didn't like seeking out Mr Frog. Even so, the next morning at sunrise I left my little alleyway, walked to her door... and waited. After a while, I grew tired of standing and sat down against the wall... and then I waited some more. I was there for well over an hour, actually, and was beginning to get a little annoyed before a sleepy-eyed Talvi finally stumbled out... on her way to breakfast, I'm guessing. Her gaze fell on me briefly, and she looked at me blankly for a moment before saying, "Oh, hi there," and continuing on her way. I was beyond words with incredulity that she'd forgotten our plans, but thankfully, only moments later, she remembered. She did an about face and came back to me. "V!" she said. "You came!"

As much as I tried not to, I couldn't help but laugh. "Yes, I did! I said I would. I'm just glad you remembered."

"Well, now..." she said, scratching the back of her head clumsily, "I almost di'n't remember, you, sweetheart... don't know why, tho'... Anyhow, let's get our stuff an' get over t' his place - how's that sound?"

We got the bundle of items, which I carried, and left her room. Right outside the door, though, was someone I hadn't seen before - a battle-hardened soldier with an overwhelmed expression. Talvi stopped to talk to him, and I crouched close to the wall, hoping I wouldn't look suspicious holding an axe and other atypical items. Fortunately, he only glanced at me once, noting the condition of my clothing before averting his eyes uncomfortably. I blushed at his glance. He was terribly handsome, with that storybook chiseled jaw and everything... He was well-mannered, too, which is rare for a soldier, saying "have a nice day" when they were finished talking. He's the kind of dwarf any girl would dream of... I'd write his name here if I only knew it, but I'm sad to say I've never seen him since... Maybe I'll draw a picture of him someday when I have better parchment and paint...

Anyway, Talvi appeared quite taken with him.

I didn't catch what was said, but eventually she sent him on his way, up towards where Splint and Mitchewawa were. Mitchewawa is our current overseer.

[[Talvieno's note: The battle-hardened soldier was supposed to be Urist, but I'm not sure if anyone caught that.]]

Talvi led me down the hallways, keeping to the shadows and pausing when necessary like any expert skulker. Not a soul noticed us on our way. She was taught by the best, or so I'm told: an odd dwarf I could never find. He was dressed and mannered as well as any ordinary citizen, she said, while all but invisible to others. I can't recall his name, though I think it started with a T... But it doesn't matter. I'll remember it later.

After a time, we reached Mr Frog's door and slipped inside.

I'd never been in his room before, and I was a little awed by all I saw: sketches papered to the walls, jugs of liquid boiling without sitting on a fire, metal rods shooting tiny bits of lightning, and ominous-looking machinery. There were several socks hung up on rods, filled with some kind of a liquid, as well as a strange hoop held up in one place that made the air on the other side look shimmery. After being in there twice, I'm almost sure that the room was bigger on the inside than it was on the outside. It was practically a wonderland to a curious mind, but I doubt I would

ever know what all of it did even if I spent my life studying everything. It was sad, in a way - I suspected her plan was to destroy everything Mr Frog had.

To my surprise, Talvi ignored it and went sniffing around on the floor. I asked in a whisper, "Are you looking for the vent shaft entrance?"

She shook her head. "We'd never find it, iff'n we did try. He's too good with smells, he is. I'm hopin' we might mebbe do somethin' else, maybe get Joseph back."

"Are we going to destroy everything?"

She looked at me like I was insane, and I didn't fail to catch the irony. "You crazy?" she asked. "If we makes Mr Frog mad, he'll try t' kill you! Y'know that, I hope."

"Preferably, if at all possible, I would rather remain alive, if it's all the same to you. I have an odd attachment to... not dying," I said, kind of flailing about verbally.

She nodded distractedly, and I wasn't sure she'd heard a word I'd said. Suddenly she stopped and stood, pointing at a large smoked glass on a low tabletop, filled with a murky, slimy liquid. "There," she said, as if that explained everything.

It was hidden behind a number of other pieces of oddly-shaped glass, and was so dusty I could only imagine that Mr Frog had forgotten about it. I approached it and cautiously peeked over the rim. Sitting at the bottom was a small tooth. I looked back at my friend quizzically. "What is that...?"

"It's a cavy tooth!" she said. "We needa get it back so I kin take it home."

"How?"

She pondered for a moment. "We gotta reach inside."

I nodded. It was the logical conclusion, unless you wanted to dump it out on the floor. I waited patiently for Talvi to finish.

A few minutes later, Talvi was still standing there, looking at me. "Aren't you going to get it?" I asked.

"Cain't, it's cavy poison. My hand'd shrivel up like a singing walnut! You ain't a cavy, tho'... 'T'won't hurt you none. Jes' reach on in ther', pull it out! Be careful, tho'."

I didn't believe there was such a thing as "cavy poison", and I really didn't want to stick my hand in whatever liquid was in there, but I didn't feel as if I could back out, now that we were actually in Mr Frog's room. With a sigh, I handed Talvi the axe, rope and shovel. After removing my bracelet, I put my hand into the glass, pulling out the tooth a bit overdramatically and handing it to her. "There you go," I said, taking the bundle back.

She acted as if it was the most precious thing in the world, and a tear of joy ran down her cheek. "Thankee so much, V," she said, wiping the tear away with her sleeve.

I nodded dismissively. "Why are we here?" I asked. I was kind of on edge - I didn't want to be here when Mr Frog got back. Talvi might be able to get away with it. I knew I wouldn't be able to. I'd be the next guinea pig.

But Talvi didn't respond. She was sniffing again.

Ten or so minutes later, she stopped... right next to Mr Frog's bed. She looked at me, with her eyes wide. "Here," she said. "It's here."

Together we managed to pull the bed away from the wall, and a small flutter of paperwork fell down from where it had been wedged. Talvi hastened to pick it up, and to my horror, she ate one of the pages. I snatched them away from her. "No!" I said. "We can't do that, it'll make him mad!"

She merely chewed the page with the unconcerned, blank stare of a cow, which she resembled, to an extent. I looked the sheets of paper over and realized they were pages of a journal: Mr Frog's journal. "Talvi, this is his journal, you can't eat this!" I scolded.

"I have before."

"Well, I'm here now," I said, putting the little stack on the bed, away from her. "And I'd rather not die, remember?"

"Right..." she said ponderingly. "'Kay, then, lets get this floor up'n moved. Gimme that shovel there, hmm?"

Confused, I handed it to her, watching to see what she would do.

She set it against the rock floor and pressed, sliding it forwards. A hidden panel lifted upwards against the shovel as she slid it, and she pressed down, levering it upwards.

"V, we's gotta get this slab up!"

It looked like stone, sounded like metal, but was as light as wood. I don't think I've ever seen anything like it. With a bit of effort we moved it to the side, and Talvi gasped.

We'd uncovered some sort of a grave... but inside weren't humanoid skeletons, but skeletons of covies. There were at least two dozen. Talvi fell to her knees, covering her mouth and choking back a cry. "Oh, my sweet little babies..."

She began to sob. Sitting down, I put my arm around her to let her know I cared.

"Georgie Boy... and Petunia... and oh, sweet Elana..." she cried, rocking back and forth in her distress. "They's all here. This's where they's all gone off to..." I caught my breath at the name of the third, wondering why she would give something an elvish name, but soon forgot. She named off the rest of them, one by one. I'm not sure how she could tell which name belonged to which, as all that was left were bones. It might've been impressive if it hadn't been so morbid.

We sat there for a while, before I gently reminded her we needed to go before Mr Frog got back. "Kin we take 'em home with us, V? Please?" she asked innocently, with hope in her eyes.

I hated to, but I shook my head. "No, Mr Frog would know we've been here."

She nodded and said goodbye to the skeletons, blowing them a kiss. We put everything back the way it had been as best as we could before leaving, and after helping Talvi fix the door and lock it, I walked with her to her room.

She wasn't the same on the way back. She looked, literally, as if she was plotting murder. Maybe she was. She told me that she'd come for me when she needed me again, and that she needed some time alone.

I went back to my little temporary home in the alley next to the hospital and huddled up under my little threadbare patchwork quilt. The alleyway was usually horribly cold, but most other skulkers avoided it, as it was so close to the corrupt doctors. I was alone. It was how I preferred things.

It wasn't until later that night that I realized with horror that my bracelet was missing. I'd left it in Mr Frog's room... and he was sure to see it if I didn't get it back.



[[Talvieno's note: It will be a long time before you see another "V" story post. I'm trying to keep things in order chronologically, and Urist doesn't sleep much.]]

## HANSLANDA:

### Realization: Part 2

Urist followed Splint down the corridor, still trying to make sense of it all. Splint turned left, into an open archway, where the unmistakable sounds of sparring echoed out. Urist grinned to himself. This he could handle.

Urist turned the corner to see a huddled mass of militia dwarves clustered tightly together. They all held pikes, and the pikes jutted out of the mass like they were pretending to be a porcupine. They didn't really seem to be truly sparring, just standing real close to each other, and kind of kicking at each other shins once in a while.

Splint marched right up to the group, and tapped one on the shoulder. "Steelcrazy. Is Colonel Fischer in there somewhere?"

The dwarf turned a wild eyed gaze on Splint, "Aye. Aye, lemme get her." He crouched down, leaving his pike where it was, oddly supported by the other dwarves, and scurried under their legs. A moment later he returned, with Fischer in tow. They both scurried out of the trainees, weaponless, and stood up straight next to Splint.

Fischer smiled at Splint cheerfully, "What's up, Splint? New weapon shipment?"

Splint more bared his teeth than grinned, "Dwarf. He wants to assess our strategic situation. I gotta get some paperwork done." Splint turned, and started to walk past Urist, but paused, "I'll be on sublevel thirty-five, supervising the magma forges. Don't come find me if you need help."

Urist shook his head. Like he could find ANYTHING on purpose in this place any which way. Fischer and Steelcrazy murmured together for a few long moments, then Steelcrazy went back to his spot in the mass. Fischer said, "Alright, dwarf. Let's talk about the military. We've got about twenty dwarves in the military, quite a few of them very well trained. Me, Draigean, Feb, Stodir, Tobul, Pokonic, and Tosid are the squad leaders, if you want more information about individual squads, talk to them." Urist shook his head, "I suspect that won't be necessary, ma'am. Uh, sir. Ma'am." Fischer glared at him, "Sir."

Urist gesticulated helplessly, "Sir."

Fischer eyed him for a minute more, then smiled sweetly, "Tell you what, you got all the info I can really give you without a better understanding of our real situation here, so why don't you run down to the living quarters level. Take a right, past the quarters, and then a left down the long hallway. Sixth room on your right. Don't go in."

Urist had a dubious expression, "If... If you insist. Someone important live down there?"

Fischer laughed as she scurried back into the training mass, "You could say that Mr. Dwarf. You could say that."

## SUS:

### Sus III's Journal

*This is a scrap of paper tucked under a pillow in a hospital bed. It has scribbling on it that appears to be written in dwarf blood. The text is rambling and delirious.*

... another attempt to escape today. Must get away. Must get back to squad. They'll help me, I know they will. But the doctors... they took my armor. Must find armor.

... lost my strength again, fainting in the armory. Of course they found me, those ogres they call "orderlies". They dragged me back to this accursed place, and then my torturers were at it again, with their leeches, their bone saws, their scalpels, their traction... Gods, always with the traction. I must be taller than most humans by now, the way they yank and stretch my poor limbs. The pain is not even the worst thing about it; the worst is hearing my joints *popping*, my bones *creaking* like timbers under too much strain.

I can't take it any more. Must get away. Must find armor.

## HANSLANDA:

### **Realization, Part III**

Urist sighed as he went down the stairs, hoping he wasn't being sent to meet another lunatic deep in the bowels of this maze. He turned down the described hallway, passing sealed chambers with slitted glass viewports in heavy-duty slabs of stone. At each doorway was a lever, obviously to open the slab. Urist passed them, growing increasingly confused. These weren't living quarters. Who could he possibly be meeting down here?

He came to the prescribed doorway, and looked in the viewslit. He tried to peer through the tiny slit into the darkness, but all he could see were gnawed bones scattered about the room. Just as he was about to turn to leave, a bony, clawed hand smashed into the glass pane, bouncing off. Urist jumped back, startled. He heard a ferocious roar.

The roar of a Holistic Spawn.

*'...we even have a spawn research center...'*

Another roar, from the next door down.

"Surprised? Former militia members. Ashsaber and Softa. They got infected during battle, and so we sealed them in. Some of the other dwarves figured it would be good to research their foe." A sneer entered the speaker's tone, "Like RESEARCH will help understand them. They're an aberration. A mutation. Born from pure betrayal." Urist turned toward the voice, his jaw hanging open, his beard twitching furtively, "You mean to say... That these were once your fellow citizens?"

The speaker nodded, still concealed by the shadows. "Indeed."

Urist snarled, "You MOTHERFUCKER! YOU LET THESE BRAVE SOULS GET CORRUPTED? FOR WHAT?"

"I did not. They were injured in battle. If you had seen the previous state of our... Medical facilities, you would understand that this is practically a mercy."

Urist snapped, rage turning his vision red. He came to with his hands wrapped around the speaker's throat, choking him. He let go, dropping the stunned dwarf to

the floor. Urist shook his head, looking back at the chambers. Dozens of them. He opened his mouth to speak, and found no words. He stumbled off, back into the fortress, into the dining room.

The dwarf he had met earlier that had drank whatever that had been was seated in a corner, sullenly surveying the dining hall. Urist sagged down into the chair in front of the dwarf, his eyes glassy from shock.

"Seen them, did you? Drink from that mug over there, the one with the aventurine cabochons." The other dwarf nodded sympathetically as Urist gulped down the concoction, "Better?"

Urist's vision was swimming, everything was crawling. He could hear colors. The other dwarf had a concerned look, "Hey fella, you okay? You don't look so good. Kinda... Well, kinda pale. Maybe you should go see a doctor."

Urist snapped out of his intoxicated haze, "Doctor? No. No doctors. Last doctor I met got butchered like a pig by my former best friend."

The dwarf shrugged, "Hey, Mitch has these boys doing much better than they were. Now they only kill like one in one hundred patients, instead of twenty out of thirty."

Urist stood, the strange feelings rushing back in as he did so. He swayed a bit, and then said, "I'm... I'ma go up to that tower... I need to get some fresh air." The other dwarf shrugged.

Urist stumbled through the hallways, the faces of other dwarves leering at him from every shadow. They gave him strange looks as he passed, and he heard murmurs following in his wake. He passed the barracks, and stopped, doubling back. Inside, Fischer and the overly dramatic dwarf from the depot were chatting in a corner. Urist came up to them, "Hey... Hey. Why did you do that? Why did you send me down there?"

Fischer smiled gently, "Now you're beginning to understand. Do you see why we are like this? Do you get it yet?"

Urist shook his head roughly, "No. That... Was wrong. Anyone can see how wrong it is to do that to your former fellows. They should die in battle."

The dramatic dwarf got a grim look, and spoke up, oddly without his vampish mannerisms, "Don't you dare abuse their sacrifices. They VOLUNTEERED for study. Once we knew they were infected, we asked them what they wanted us to do. They wanted to help dwarven kind." He pushed the highly confused Urist back, "They are MY FRIENDS. I WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR THEM."

Fischer chimed in, "WE would do anything for them. We feed them, keep them safe. Despite their... Mutation, the core of the dwarf that once was is still in them. You can see it if you look deep enough. When we can learn nothing more from them, then we shall give them a warrior's death, and a full and proper burial in accordance with the traditions. Until then, we need every advantage over the spawn we can get. And we have learned so much from them."

Urist sat down on the floor heavily, trying to understand through his drug-induced haze, "Like what?"

Fischer smiled, "The spawn fear only one thing."

The other dwarf finished the thought, "Hell."



## HANSLANDA:

### **Iohanne Fergit Furor**

Iohanne finished his explorations of the fort, and set about forming some sort of escape plan just in case. He found numerous tunnels in the soil sections of the fort that could be used to exit the fortress proper, but anything that may cause him to face the Dwarven soldiery would probably end with these routes being blocked by the sheer number of dwarves he'd have to sneak by. He decided the some of the mine shafts could very easily be used for escape, but only into the highly dangerous subterranean caverns, which wasn't much better than being trapped in a fortress full of homicidal dwarves.

Basically, his escape routes were just as dangerous as anything that could cause him to require them. And since it took Command thirty minutes to link a wormhole to a specified location, this meant escape from within the fortress proper was a rather chancy affair.

Iohanne brooded on this conundrum as he went to the pre-assigned dead-drop location, a tiny closet that served no apparent purpose, just outside some workshops. In the closet was a nondescript brown package that, on further inspection, smelled faintly of ozone. Iohanne took the package into a more secluded area, and carefully pulled it open.

Inside was two small vials filled with a colorless substance. a tiny device that would spray the substance in a fine airborne mist, and a short piece of paper describing the effects of the substance. Iohanne skimmed it and grunted to himself. Hypnotics were never quite as effective as domination drugs, but it would do. The six hour wait for full effects to set in would also be somewhat of an issue, but thankfully the drugs stayed within the system for several days, so he wouldn't have to stress over a narrow window of opportunity.

Now all that remained was application.

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Iohanne's tracking device indicated the subject was on the dining levels. Iohanne slipped out of his hiding place, mister strapped onto his wrist, and waited a moment. The soldierdwarf passed through the intersection Iohanne lingered at, and Iohanne followed him into the Spawn Research Center. The dwarf wandered down the hall, and looked in a couple of the cells. Then one of the Spawn smashed a clawed hand off the cell door, and the dwarf stepped back, surprised and obviously stunned. Iohanne recognized his opportunity, and recalled some of the short history of this fortress. He stepped forward, within arms reach of the dwarf, and sprayed the mister above the dwarf's head. Then he said, "Surprised? Former militia members. Ashsaber and Softa. They got infected during battle, and so we sealed them in. Some of the other dwarves figured it would be good to research their foe." Iohanne felt a sneer creeping across his face, "Like RESEARCH will help understand them. They're an aberration. A mutation. Born from pure betrayal."

"You mean to say... That these were once your fellow citizens?" The dwarf turned slowly to face Iohanne, his face unreadable.

"Indeed." Iohanne said smugly, sure he would provoke the proper response. The dwarf's lips twisted into a snarl, and he practically growled out, "You

MOTHERFUCKER! YOU LET THESE BRAVE SOULS GET CORRUPTED? FOR WHAT?"

"I did not. They were injured in battle. If you had seen the previous state of our... Medical facilities, you would understand that this is practically a mercy." Iohanne thought that he'd put just the right amount of scorn, arrogance, and remorselessness into his words, and he was proven right a moment later.

The dwarf dived at Iohanne, and wrapped his burly hands around Iohanne's throat. Iohanne tensed his neck, but the dwarf was far stronger. Iohanne put the mister right in the dwarf's face, and emptied the last of its contents directly into the dwarf's eyes, nose and mouth. He felt blackness nibbling at the edges of his vision, but before he could pass out or incapacitate the dwarf, the dwarf came to his senses, and looked at Iohanne.

The dwarf dropped the asphyxiating assassin to the floor, a stunned look on his face. He shook his head, opened his mouth to speak, but instead he turned and stumbled out of the SRC in a daze. Iohanne wheezed for a few moments, trying to catch his breath, then picked himself up off the floor, and followed the dwarf out of the center.

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Six hours later, Iohanne was shadowing the dwarf again. The dwarf bumped into the Overseer Splint, who ordered him to go down to the magma forges. Iohanne looked behind himself at the staircase, and sighed. He would have to hustle to avoid being seen. He hated running.

Iohanne dodged down the stairs, taking them two at a time to beat the dwarf to the forges. After several hundred flights of stairs, he was in the forges. He took a few moments to catch his breathe, and leaned against a nearby bin.

In a moment of curiosity, he glanced inside the bin. A wafer of gorgeous baby blue metal twinkled back at him from atop the pile of bars inside the bin. Iohanne's breathe caught in his throat, and his eyes dilated as the adamantite took him under its' sway.

He was lost in the beautiful glint of the red glow of magma off the wafer, the flickering of the torch reflected off its complex structure. His imagination spiraled wildly, the adamantite whispering radical thoughts of domination and glory if only Iohanne could acquire the power hidden beneath it. He pictured himself at the head of a legion of demons and devils, massive beasts of flame and ash and stone and bone flanking him as they marched across the multiverse plundering and destroying. In that moment, Iohanne's mind was broken by the greed adamantite generated in all sentients that gazed upon it. Little did he know he was now a pawn of forces that ruled the underworld since time immemorial.

[[Talvieno's note: This started a discussion on what language the Romans would've thought was the coolest.]]

**(Llasram):** I've wanted to post to get a dwarf, but it always feels like I'm interrupting something.

**(Mr Frog):** You aren't. We may be a bunch of nutjobs writing grimdark fanfiction about a gore-splattered hole in the ground full of mutants and madmen, but we're always happy to induct new acolytes into our little cult.  
... We seem to yammer on a lot between updates... we aren't exactly an exclusive club, though :p As long as you're at least following the conversation, there's no harm in putting your two cents in. There's definitely no harm in asking for a dorfing request 😊 We don't bite. We leave the biting to the Spawn.

**(Splint):** ... yes, we do throw a lot of idle chatter around, but it's to kill time and keep the thread happy and active. Any specifics? gender, profession... If not, then you'll probably be defaulted into the army.

[[Talvieno's note: This nice, friendly, touching conversation somehow managed to get itself derailed into demon vs Spawn battles, and mug catapults.]]

[[Talvieno's note: And the derailed continued onwards for a number of pages, staying *just* on-topic enough to avoid bugging anyone.]]

## HANSLANDA:

Urist nodded, "Hell. Right. Gotcha. Everyone knows that is a myth."

The dramatic dwarf nodded, "Aye, so it is said. But they also say adamantine is a myth, and you have seen our militia wearing that myth."

Urist shook his head, "Could have been an alloy. Maybe cobaltite, aluminum, and steel."

Fischer laughed, "Really? That's a bit of a convoluted excuse for something quite easily explained. It's adamantine. Here," Fischer withdrew a dagger from her belt, handing it to Urist.

Urist looked at the beautifully made dagger, gently hefting it. It was so light, Urist felt as if it would float away. He tested the edge, gently rubbing his thumb across it. It nearly shaved his thumbprint off. Urist handed the dagger back, sighing, "Okay, so it IS adamantine. That doesn't prove hell is real."

Fischer sighed back, "Okay, listen. We have a mythical metal that is said to be the only thing holding the legions of hell back from the real world. We are in the midst of a war zone with the most feared enemy of dwarfkind, that was conveniently a myth until about six or seven years ago. I'm going to go ahead and believe hell is real, because so far, the myths seem pretty accurate."

Urist shrugged, "Sure. I bet you believe in dragons too."

The other dwarf said, "Oh come on, don't be absurd. Everyone knows dragons aren't real."

Urist laughed with them, then said, "I better go, I'm not sure I can handle hearing more about this place right now. It's all a bit overwhelming."

Fischer smiled, "That's what Draigneau said when he first got here too. Give it a few days, soon you'll understand."

Urist smiled, backing away, then started walking down the hall swiftly. He turned a corner, and a flustered looking Splint stopped him, "Hey, you. Whatever your name is. I need you to go down to the catacombs and count the full coffins and empty

coffins. Then I want you to go down to the magma forges and ask the smiths how many of each kind of metal bar they have. Oh, and wafers. I need to know how many adamantite wafers are left. Hurry, it's vitally important."

Urist was stunned, "Uh, I don't live here... I'm not... Yeah, I'll get right on that." The two parted ways, Urist as confused as ever. He got curious as to what the magma forges were like, and what an adamantite wafer looked like, so he started down the stairs.

Slightly under an hour later, Urist reached the forges, somewhat out of breath. He leaned against the wall, breathing in the crisp, heated air. He smiled, enjoying the depth he was at. Only a few smiths were working, and this far below the surface, not many dwarves were hanging around. A lone idler sidled up to Urist, his voice hoarse, "Been here before?"

Urist eyed the dwarf, "It's you. From the research center. Why are you down here?" The dwarf shrugged, "I had something I had to tell you."

"But I didn't even know I was coming down here."

The dwarf smiled oddly, not letting the expression reach his eyes, "Yes, but that doesn't mean no one knew you were coming here."

Urist turned on the odd dwarf, "What the hell are you talking about? No one knew, no one bothered asking me what I was doing."

The dwarf sighed, "Sorry, I truly enjoy being cryptic, it's somewhat empowering. Don't concern yourself with my means and sources of information. Just know that I have a purpose for you, and soon."

Urist found himself growing angry, something in this dwarf's manner grating on his nerves, "If you don't explain yourself, a sore throat won't be the only thing you're sporting."

Urist got a cold look for his trouble, "Threats? From you? Don't be foolish. As to explanations, you will know what I meant when the time comes. If you don't make the right decision, millions will die. Worlds will burn." The dwarf smiled again, "You wouldn't want that, would you?"

Urist grinned coldly, "I guess you'll find out, won't you, you smarmy little bastard?" The mystery dwarf's smile wavered, but as he turned to leave, he said, "Just remember this conversation when the time comes, and don't be a fool."

## MITCHEWAWA:

Oh hey. I have a **huge** origin story of Spawn. Mostly done in one sitting too.

**On the rise and fall of vampires; The True Spawn**  
**Researched by unknowns, long past. Written by Mitch Istraemoth**

Vampires are often a subject of myth in many cultures; whilst all who live know what a vampire is, no one knows from where the story originated. It is also strange that the foreign races with no ties to civilised sentient races, such as kobolds, often make cave paintings of beings similar to vampires. Even island-secluded beast races, none of whom had ever even known about the outside world, make art of their fanged brethren stalking the night. How did this creature become such a trope among every

civilisation? Well, I and some like-minded associates have been scouring every lost ruins and every dusty library for any signs of historical evidence of the existence of vampires. Old, forgotten chronicles, wall engravings, even the scrapings of insane babblers.

Recently, a necromancer invaded the town of Spearbreakers, a place I had strangely enough come to rule for a year. Deler Inkblushed fell to our military, and though his fellow necromancers and legions of undead still wait outside, we were able to procure the book he was carrying from his carcass. 'We See Deler Inkblushed' was a shoddily written, self-indulging novel, featuring pop-up smut. However, knowing the ageless life of a necromancer, I read it anyway. It turns out Deler had existed since the dawn of Dwarves; and in one of the more sane parts of the book that (thankfully) did not include himself, he told of some of the worlds history.

Vampires had existed in all races, but all but the dwarves had made them extinct. The humans simply appraised the gods that had cursed some of them with vampirism with the offerings of an entire year's worth of babies born. The elves learnt to de-contaminate their water, and family members took shifts guarding over each other at night until inquisitors had weeded out the last of the vampires. Goblins, for one miserable month, starved themselves to near-extinction to separate those that were immune to hunger from those that weren't. Deler assumes that the beast races and kobolds, because they slept near each other due to their tribal nature, easily caught and mobbed vampires. However, dwarves were too stubborn, their law more based on reaction then investigation. Vampires thrived in dwarven settlements because no one knew how to hunt them down, bar witnessing a murder.

From the years 133BW (before the invention of the written word) to 4AW (after the invention of the written word), dwarves were plummeting into extinction from famine and war with a faction of goblins, led by a demon of with great power and an unspeakable list of kills to his name. In 2BW, a large number of dwarves had, because of a select few zealous vampire-enthusiasts, been poisoned with vampire blood. The cultists had infected major wells within the Mountainhome, the last remaining stronghold that had not fallen to the goblins. The dwarves managed to purge the wells, but it was too late. Nearly a tenth of the dwarven population had been cursed, which means another tenth of the population were cannibalised every few months. The ruling authority had to do **something**.

So, they waited for a miracle. And one happened. During one of many sieges, a section of housing was hit by a boulder from a catapult, causing a cave-in. Its inhabitants were crushed. It took weeks, but teams of miners managed to dig away at the cave-in, and found a live dwarf trapped under **tons** of stone. A normal dwarf would have been vaporised by the rocks, or if they miraculously survived that, simply died of dehydration. This was obviously a vampire. The mangled creature could not use its super-natural attributes to escape, and was helpless to resist being locked up and experimented on. The nobility suggested finding a weakness. During the day, for many weeks, this vampire was made a public spectacle, as passers by paid to stab, shoot, beat and mutilate the chained up dwarf, guards told to look for something someone does that actually wounds the vampire. Some nights, when the guards were available and needed extra gold, they opened up a side-business were particularly shady characters paid to rape the poor thing. Despite being stabbed, bludgeoned and beat in every imaginable part by every imaginable metal, it regenerated from the brink of death each time.

Months later, one particularly dark day, the goblins had gotten closer to breaking the Mountainhome. The food stockpiles had run out as vampires began to target farmers who lived in areas less population-dense. Most of the militia had died from hunger, vampires, disease, catapult or accident, and each week when the goblins assaulted the walls they were repelled by numbers growing thinner and thinner. Miners were forced to dig deeper and deeper to find iron to fuel the war-effort, lest they be forced to scavenge it from the dangerous battlefields. On this day, they in the darkness struck a mysterious blue metal. It took hours of swings to break loose, yet was lighter than the last breaths of a dying man. What little scraps the few miners who remained could break free were sent to the nobility, who had metalsmiths forge the mysterious metal into a single light, blue sword. The king himself, who rarely left his bedroom out of fear, was the first to grasp the hilt of the sword. As he swung it idly at a marble pillar, the air itself seemed to tear away at the sword's edge as it slashed right through the stone. His arm was weak from long, bed-ridden years, yet the pillar simply gave way to the sword. Onlookers knew what to do.

The Captain of the Guard, now wielding sword and leading a mob of angry and eager dwarves from every part of the fortress, marched from the palace to the publicly captive vampire, this day hung by his hands chained behind his back, with a box over his head. The locals were testing the effectiveness of rabid rats, locked in with the vampire's screaming, fanged face. However, the Captain cleared a path through the crowd, and took the box off the vampire's head. The diseased rats fell off the vampire's grotesque face, with lips, eyes and cheeks all chewed off. Many onlookers threw up or wretched at the sight, but the Captain simply seethed at the vampire as its features grew back from nothing. The vampire smirked and hissed at its captor, its face fully healed. It knew that the dwarves were desperate, and that even though he was in small pain, he could not be truly harmed. The Captain raised his sword and slapped the beast across the face with the flat of his blade. And something fantastic happened; as the metal struck flesh, the flesh began to sizzle and burn. The vampire felt pain. Not fleeting discomfort, but real **pain**. Like in the days before his transformation, when he would burn his fingers in the forges. The vampire screamed and kicked and yelled, dislocating its shoulders as its weight pulled them out of their sockets. That did not hurt him, but his face burned with holy fire. The Captain laughed, and the crowd cheered. Then he raised the sword above his head, and slashed down on the vampire's neck, and done what no others could; he pierced its bones. The sword simply melted the vampire's spine away where it struck, and the vampire was beheaded. To this day, lost somewhere down in that long forgotten city, Deler writes that the head of the vampire still adorns the throne room as a menacing ornament for the king.

For once, the nobility were in agreement. No one argued. Nearly the whole city was levied in either forging iron picks, exploratory mining for more of this metal, now dubbed 'adamantine' after an attribute dwarves often like to associate themselves with, digging out existing adamantite, or bringing entire cartfuls back to the palace. Crafters, shop owners, housewives, nobles, all but the farmers, guards and brewers abandoned their trade in exchange for the glory of mining adamantite, and every dwarf was paid in good sums of gold for their efforts. It did not take long for a curfew to take effect in order to 'reduce darkness-related accidents', though most knew it was to curb the muggings (brought by the new influx of wealth, donated by the king from his very own coffers) and vampire attacks that happened late at night. It didn't take long after that before a previously emptied tunnel had to be closed off after a 'mining accident, brought by digging too deep. No one knew what happened, but dozens died that day. Soon, all of the adamantite that people dared to dig out

had been dug, and all of it was stockpiled at the palace. No one dared to keep any of it for themselves; they knew the importance of their work.

Over the course of a few weeks, each and every dwarf was rounded up and brought to the palace by close to one hundred levied guards. Every dwarf that did not comply with the round up were assumed (always correctly) to be vampires, and were immediately put down with their adamantine blades. The long hall was perfect for forming snaking queues of up to a few thousand, where each and every dwarf was touched by the flat of an adamantine sword. The hundreds vampires who were foolish enough to even come to the palace were caught and sent to a specially dug dungeon, where Deler assumes they were locked in for eternity. For the first time in over a century, the dwarves felt safe from vampires. Though it wouldn't be months later until the vampire threat was considered quashed, the enthusiastic mobs were quick to point out possible vampires to the guards, whose numbers of employment had increased dramatically after the mining boom died down. After all, post a steady wage, few wanted to go back to being a housewife.

Decades later, the fortresses was abandoned. Their new adamantine weapons allowed them to push back the goblins, and take back their old homes. People were forced to emigrate the Mountainhome to fill the retaken fortresses, including wondrous metropolises whose quality of living far surpassed that of the Mountainhome. Eventually, the old fortress was left behind, long-hollowed out for minerals and adamantine. Also left behind was the eternal dungeon of vampires, who, beneath leagues of rock and soil, changed. Their dungeon was more than a simple prison; it was a torture ground. The king had lost loved ones to vampires, and unlike the populace who were happy to just be rid of the vampires, he sought to punish those that remained. Beneath the skin of every vampire, he ordered his surgeons to weave suits of adamantine to be implemented as an eternal brand to those who dared terrorise the night. No one but the highest of the nobility (who included Deler, apparently) knew about this horrible torture. The vampires suffered, every second of every day, a pain-event-horizon. Given enough suffering, isolation, time and the supernatural properties of both vampires and adamantine, it was inevitable that adventurers discovered... something not quite dwarven. Since then, the adventurers were never heard from again, and monster attacks increased dramatically across the world.

But how can we be sure Deler is correct? What if the Spawn and vampires are unrelated? Well, there are a few coincidences that line up perfectly to make it not only feasible, but extremely likely:

- The ungodly agility, strength and endurance of both vampires and Spawn.
- Both can indoctrinate their victims, though most choose only to cannibalise and kill their victims.
- We know that both have dwarven origins.
- **The fangs**
- The disturbance of the vampire tomb correlates with the years the Spawn were first seen.
- Both are nigh invulnerable; needing no sleep, food, drink or even companionship to stay alive.



So, Deler knew how the Spawn came to be. And where the vampires went. It disappoints me that he did not come forward with first-hand accounts of the world before written history, though I would have done the same if I were a necromancer on an (and I can sympathise with this) insane quest for power. Now I and my associates will be digging more into the history of the Spawn, in order to find their weakness. I know for a fact that, while effective, adamantine does not burn their flesh with a touch and I doubt any metal will. Ancient stories of Syrupleaf tell stories of how rabble with **catapults** managed to fend off sieges, but that seems highly unlikely. Just as unlikely as heroes of impossible skill batting Spawn miles across the landscape with warhammers.

- Signed, still looking, Mitch.

## HANSLANDA:

Ragh. I'm currently undecided on the progression of events in 'Urist'. How should Urist deal with the mysterious stranger? Is his mission even possible? Will the fortress fall? Will the drugs ever wear off?

Let's find out, in the next episode of Urist: Some Dwarf That Did Things.

### **Urist: The Dwarf That Did Things**

Urist brooded over his second meeting with the stranger, leaning against the wall opposite the forges. He turned every word over and over in his head, searching for new meaning. Finally, he gave up, deciding that he'd better just get on with his life and burn that bridge when he got to it. Urist turned, heading up the stairs for fresher air.

After ascending all the stairs, he felt a bit out of breath, so he went into the nightmarish dining hall, and sat at a table alone. Dozens of mugs were piled on the table, most half empty, some full. Urist gave them a cursory look, then just picked one and downed it. It tasted like booze, so he took another and downed it too. It didn't help him catch his breath, but it sure made him feel better about his situation. Several drinks later, Urist felt the strange feelings coming back. "Oh great, I drank another one of those laced drinks..." He groaned, feeling foolish for not checking the mugs more thoroughly. He felt sounds, and heard colors, a truly intriguing sensation. For awhile, he was afraid to move, thinking it would only make everything worse. Then, deciding he might as well go back to the depot to check on Sarvesh and the others, Urist stood and walked from the dining hall. He felt amazing, his whole body aglow with warmth. His movements felt so fluid and greased, and his eyesight felt sharper than it ever had. He saw whole new colors, the walls shivering and breathing as he passed.

Going up the stairs, he felt as if he were climbing a great mountain with every step. Urist smiled at the wondrous new depths of feeling he was experiencing, when he

reached the top step. With the thought that this astounding hike would end, he frowned a bit, all the good feelings fleeing him in an instant like cats before a magma breach.

The shadows groped at him cruelly, every dwarf that passed had the face of a monster, their eyes shining sickly and their teeth elongated and pointed, like vampires. Urist struggled to contain his terror, wanting to bash their faces in, to flee this hell. Urist entered the trade depot, the muted sunlight shining through the roiling dark red clouds and dark thunderheads. Sarvesh was lounging against a wall with several other guards, just chatting idly to pass time.

Urist sat on one of the wagon benches, and took a biscuit out of his pack. He didn't want to eat, he wanted the feelings to pass, but he would try. The first bite was delicious, but the second turned to ash in his mouth. He forced himself to chew through it and swallow, washing it down with plain water from his hip-flask.

Sarvesh appeared at his side, saying something. Urist mumbled, "Huh?"

Sarvesh said, "I asked how it was? Did you learn anything?"

Urist smiled through the feelings, "It was fine. I learned a lot about their strategic position, for sure. I just need to digest it all for awhile. I'll come over and talk to you then, for now let me be alone with my thoughts."

"Sure, sure. I only ask because you were looking at that biscuit like it had killed your family, your dog, and it owed you money. I was somewhat worried." Sarvesh chuckled a bit.

"No, I'm fine. Just very deep in thought is all." Urist smiled again, feeling the internal storm starting to recede a bit. He took another bite. "Giff muh a mimit."

"Alright, enjoy the snack." Sarvesh sauntered away, back to his conversation, while Urist thought to himself.

'What the hell did I drink earlier that a mugful did THIS?!'

## HANSLANDA:

And now, without further ado, excepting this ado, I present another excerpt from the Adventures of Urist: Some Dwarf that Did Stuff.

### **THE ADVENTURES OF URIST: Some Dwarf That Did Stuff**

Eventually, Urist no longer felt the effects of his spiked drink, and felt safe enough to venture back into the fortress proper. Sarvesh wished him luck, and Urist entered the darkened interior of the fort once more. He planned on finding Mitch to discuss his tenure as expedition leader, but he didn't have much faith in his own ability to navigate the maze of rooms and corridors.

As Urist wandered, he noticed that there was a truly absurd amount of doors in this place. One could just open individual doors all day for weeks and not see all the doors. He came to an odd sight after nearly an hour of aimless wandering. The hallway he was in was wide enough for four dwarves to pass through abreast, and covering half this distance, was a door. The door didn't stretch wide enough to cover

the whole hallway, but for some reason, it had still been installed here. Urist opened it, then closed it, somewhat amused at the absurdity of this door. It perfectly represented the whole fortress, at least to Urist.

Completely unnecessary, ultimately ineffective and aesthetically disturbing, but for some odd reason, oddly appealing.

Urist chuckled, and continued on his meanderings. After a long while, he came across the dwarf that had dosed him. The dwarf was examining a mechanism inside a workshop, a grim look set on his face. Urist leaned against the doorjamb, watching this curiously tall dwarf. The dwarf opened the mechanism, moving a few gears and adjusting a valve.

Finally, the dwarf noticed him. "Yes?" He said, unemotionally.

"I was wondering what was in that mug you had me drink from earlier." Urist said, a sharp edge to his voice.

A calculating look entered the dwarf's eyes, and his grim expression grew even grimmer, "Nothing that will harm you, though it could have been. It was strictly necessary that you drank it, otherwise I would never have let you have some of my precious supply."

"Supply of what?" Urist was, per usual for this place, incredibly confused.

"That is unimportant. What is important is that you drank it. Don't worry about it; just continue along with your day. The effects are intermittent, you probably just ended the second phase a couple hours ago, the next phase comes in about eight to twelve hours. If I got your bodyweight right." The dwarf's expression resembled the ghost of a smile. "Do you need anything else, I'm somewhat busy right now."

Urist sighed, "No. But we will be discussing this in detail later; don't think I'm finished with you."

The ghost of a smile reappeared, "Oh, I'm sure we'll have more to discuss later. *I* am not finished with *you*, in point of fact. Go away." He returned to his fiddling with the mechanism, effectively dismissing Urist.

Urist left the conversation even more confused than he had been. He mulled over the discussion in his mind.

Suddenly he realized that it had been somewhat similar to his conversation with the stranger in the research center and the forges. The mechanic dwarf had had some of the same speech mannerisms, the same way of speaking of vague things beyond common knowledge. Perhaps they both kept secrets as a matter of course. Or maybe they had the same secret.

Urist tried to puzzle out their purpose with him, but he didn't have enough information. He did realize that he was just a pawn in a larger game, and he resolved to throw off both plans if possible. Nothing good could come from these two strangers.

With that decided, Urist felt conviction and certainty growing in him. He was not just a pawn. He would not be used, like a tool.

He was a dwarf, not a human. A human can be manipulated, used, and distracted.

Dwarves were different. Single-minded. Stubborn. Stupid.

Urist would not be used, no matter the cost.

## SPLINT:

Had nothing better to do, so I figured I'd add a new bit to the barbarians, with ideas on how to flesh them out contributed by Hanslanda.

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*As you walk away from the now quiet and more literally dead tower, several books and fine trinkets in your pack along with the steel slab you'd been sent to retrieve, you take a drink from that lovely platinum flask you took of the dwarven necromancer. Your thoughts drift along idly until the next day, where you see a great mountain range in the distance.*

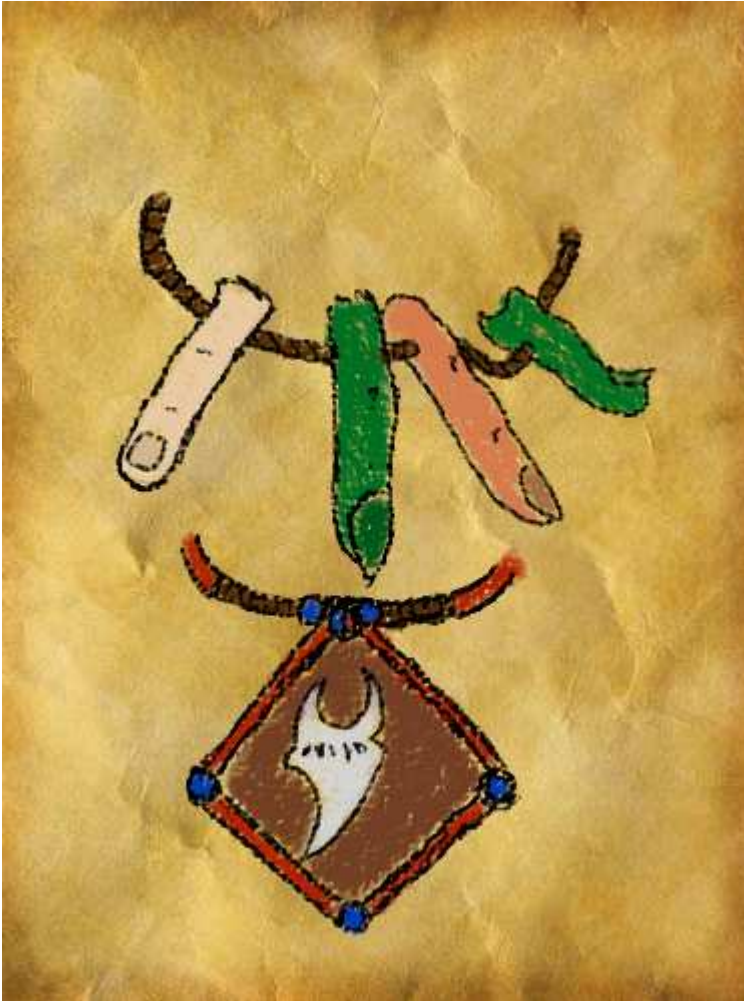
*The air reeks of death, and bones line the land. You shrug it off, hiding from the grimelings and harpies as you climb the first mountain to find an alcove to sleep in for the night. Then you see it. As you reach the mouth of a cave, you see a silver slab. While your skill with barbarian is shaky at best, you can make out "Abandon all hope, ye fools who enter here." Below is a crude carving of a dwarven skull with crossed flails. You ignore it and make camp in the cave, and crack open the Barbarian book at a random page to kill time until you fall asleep.*

-----

... It seems war has become a test of adulthood among the barbarians. Specifically, the "Trial of the Maw." It seems they have fought the Spawn of Holistic for so long that these demons are ingrained into the culture of these corrupted humans. The trial consists of a warband captain leading a group of green warriors, regardless if they be male or female, to fight a group of Spawn. According to the clan historian I spoke to, casualties always run high in the Trail of The Maw, with 45% of a warband being killed or otherwise incapacitated/crippled on average. All those who come back alive must bring a trophy, whether it be an eye, an ear, finger or tooth, as proof they stood against the beasts. Those who cannot continue to be warriors due to injury fill the other roles of the clan. I've seen those individuals. She was a barbarian girl who was notably more human looking, though her skin was still a sickly ash color compared to the usual dark grey or black these people exhibit, had lost use of both legs in her trial due to motor nerve damage, but was among the better metalworkers in her settlement.

However even she' like all others in the settlement, had at least one trophy. Trophies taken in battle are considered their most treasured possessions, and while they share other things relatively freely with their own, to take their war trophies is to incur the wrath of the whole settlement, even the warband marshal, who is the chief noble of these villages. The most commonly taken trophy is the tooth of an enemy, though others may opt to take ears or fingers, the latter being second most common.

[Following is an image of a finger necklace, and an amulet composed of a tooth set in fired clay. I intend to draw this and edit it in later.]



[[Talvieno's note: And he did. But you don't have to wait.]]

*The following appears to be of their various gods and festivals, so you continue reading well into the night until you fall asleep at last.*

## HANSLANDA:

Urist had a grim smile on his face now. He walked more purposefully through the corridors of Spearbreakers, searching for former expedition leader Mitch. He passed odd and demented sights that would have confounded and disturbed him but a few hours ago, but now he barely registered them.

Several hours of searching later, he located Mitch, deep in a mine shaft on one of the lower, unused levels. Mitch was napping in a corner, comfortably tucked around a corner in a dead end, where no one could see him. Urist pondered for awhile, and then finally just kicked Mitch in the foot.

One eye cracked open balefully, and Mitch nearly growled, "What?"

"We need to talk about your tenure as leader. I've got questions that be needing answers, and so far as I can tell, you're probably the best person to ask." Urist smiled sweetly, "And if you don't talk to me, I'll tell everyone where your favorite hideaway is."

Mitch closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "Bastard." He murmured quietly. "Alright, what do you want to know?"

Urist chuckled, "I know my daddy, thanks. And I want to know how the military here shapes up against the Spawn and other enemies around here. I want to know what fortifications would be required to make this place a good encampment for a dwarven army, in your opinion. Also, I want to know why you folks are so hell bent on digging too deep."

Mitch opened his eyes and sat up a bit as he started speaking, "Well, for starters, the military is good at their job, but I wouldn't throw them at anything they didn't outnumber, excepting the zombies. They train hard and fight harder, don't knock 'em. Second, we'd probably need to clear the main gate for traffic, extend those fortifications into a full on fort. Connect the lone archery tower with about six more in a ring, retake and refurbish the Keep on the Hill, and then carve out some living quarters, barracks, and basic food procurement stations up there. About six to ten years of work, with our current workforce." Mitch smiled, and said, "And the last one is our business. Don't you worry your little head about our exploratory mining."

Urist grimaced, "Digging too deep is what unleashed the Spawn on us the first time. I sincerely doubt anything good will come of it being done again. But I'll let you have that one. Are you sure a single walled fort would be sufficient?"

Mitch laughed, "I doubt it would be adequate, but it would be a nice start. A perfect defense would be a triple walled and moated fortress with inwards and outwards facing fortifications and trap design. A large panic room disconnected from everything underneath, where the civilians would bivouac when trouble came. The panic room is sealed tightly, and the military fights, winning or losing their battle independent of the survival of the outpost. We could always reinforce it by digging long tunnels far past siege lines and sneaking troops in. But that's in a perfect world. I've got some more napping to do, you mind?"

Urist smiled, "Not at all, I think I've got a good start on my report forming in my mind. Sweet dreams." Urist strode away as Mitch resettled himself. Urist returned to the caravan and started writing up his preliminary report for the Baron. Mostly it was basic infrastructure information and 'first-hand interviews', Urist not letting himself put in some of the comments he felt would be more appropriate.

Finally, after nearly an hour, his hand cramped up and he found himself unable to write anymore. He decided to put it away for the day, and sleep on his thoughts. Time passed, more hours ticking by. Deep in the bowels of the fortress, two not-quite dwarves grew nervous, both hoping they had timed everything right. Urist slept peacefully, for the first time in a very long time.

**(Hanslanda):** And now, for a special treat, independent of the Urist tales.

*Chapter Ten: Fungal Agents, from On Complex Anti-Hypnotics and Anti-Amnesiacs, by Grendal Vasiliy*

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*Excerpt Accessed*

...but in some iterations, this particular plant begins producing a very special toxin. Unable to even exist in most versions of reality, this poison specifically targets several areas of the central nervous system, causing several phases of symptoms of varying intensity and duration. Highly dependant on body size, these phases are as follows:

**Phase One:** In the initial stages of toxicity, the symptoms are highly similar to low grade hallucinogens, producing synaesthesia-type effects, much like psilocybin mushrooms more commonly found throughout the continuum. These symptoms are short-lived and low intensity. Immediately following the end of the initial symptoms is about six to ten hours of asymptomatic normality.

**Phase Two:** Once the body has finished metabolizing the toxin fully, the toxin falls dormant for a long period of time, covered above in phase one. After this period of inactivity, the toxin resurfaces, being burned out of fat cells with exertion. Similar symptoms to phase one are exhibited, but far more intense, and possibly unpleasant. Typically they include a feeling of well-being or peacefulness, followed by extreme terror and paranoia, hallucinations of shadowy figures, faces appear unreal and twisted, appetite is either increased or decreased tremendously, exercise is perceived as incredibly pleasurable, and sociability is either increased or decreased tremendously. Another period of inactivity follows this phase, lasting between six and twenty hours.

**Phase Three:** The most controversial and highly debated phase, phase three is considered by some to be simply high grade hallucinations. Others argue that-

*Transmission Interrupted*

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## TALVIENO:

[[Talvieno's note: It took a long time for Hanslanda to decide Urist could sleep, hence the long delay in the V update in the chronology.

### **From the Journal of V**

*The next entry's pages have fallen out and been placed in the wrong order, but you manage to rearrange them after some work. The charred stick text is as flowing as in the other entries, although here it is a bit smudged.*

Most basement-class dwarves have at least one possession that's precious to them: a keepsake, basically. It might be a leather etching of their family, or a ring that was



passed down to them. It could even be something simple like a knitted sock their grandmother made. It doesn't have to be valuable, but the idea is the same: it's something that reminds us of a time when we were better off, and gives us hope that things might someday be like that again. My only keepsake is my bracelet. It looks golden, but I was never sure if it was real gold or just copper painted to look like it. It's shaped like a ring of intertwined roses, and it has a little charm on it - a golden star. My initials are carved into the side of the bracelet, in a flowing script. Before she died, my granmomma always said it was from my mother and father - I remember her saying I'd grow into it eventually. My granpa didn't like to talk about it for one reason or another - I have a feeling he didn't like my parents. I don't remember them, but I still keep the bracelet with me everywhere I go. But I'd left it in Mr Frog's room, and if the desire to get my bracelet back wasn't enough to spur me into going, the knowledge that Mr Frog would find it definitely was. But I was still terrified of going alone. It had been easier with Talvi along, as she'd offered encouragement and acted brave. It's always easier to be brave if there's someone who actually *is* brave there with you.

I've a terrible problem with indecision. It can take me hours to make up my mind about something, especially if I feel there's a lot at stake, and this was no exception. Though the evening bell had sounded before I discovered my bracelet was missing, it was an hour more before I decided that I couldn't go without Talvi's help, so I decided to go and find her.

Leaving the safe darkness of my little alleyway, I walked through the long, dim corridors of the fortress, heading for the stairs. Other dwarves passed by me, hurrying along with their duties. Everyone but the watchdwarves would sleep at night, but that time was an hour or more away, so I knew I'd have to watch carefully for anyone who might stop me. I was so scared that I almost felt like hiding when anyone passed, but I really didn't want to look conspicuous.

But I didn't make it to Talvi's room. I saw her ahead of me, going up the stairs, which was odd: ever since the majority of the workshops had been moved deeper underground, there wasn't really anything for her to do on the upper levels. Even so, I followed her, hiding in the shadows as I went along so that she wouldn't see me. I was curious to see where she would go, and though I felt a bit guilty about hiding from a friend, I was worried what she might be doing, since I knew she was in such a terrible mood.

My worries proved to be ill-founded: she stopped outside the door of Splint, our broker/bookkeeper, knocking a few times. The door opened, and she entered. I realized I'd already forgotten what I'd overheard Splint telling Talvi the night before: that she should come and talk to him. I smiled in spite of myself and left the shadows, walking down the dusty, dirty hallway towards Splint's room. The floors and walls there were not of stone, but of dirt and clay, and kept from collapsing inwards by wooden arches that also supported the ceiling.

I pressed my ear against the door, listening carefully for the conversation I assumed was taking place. I didn't hear much of anything, though, until Splint got angry.

"You broke into his room?!?" I heard him cry, followed by the sound of a mug shattering against the wall. It startled me, and I jumped. "Why in Armok's name would you do something like that?!?"

"Mr. Splint, I done knew he killed my covies dead, I did, and iss what I found!"

"Talvi, it's against the law to break into someone else's room - unless of course you're just passing through on the way to your room due to bad architectural design. But this is inexcusable!"

"I'm sorry, Splint, really I is, but I didn' have no choice! Same as a zombie's toothbrush!"

"No! Damn it, Talvi, what did you see in there? Tell me everything you saw!"

"I jus' tole you! I saw all mah covies dead in there, unner his bed."

"That's not what I meant, and you don't even know if those were yours! I gave Mr Frog permission to use stray guinea pigs in his experiments so that he wouldn't use dwarves!"

"Well, beggin' yer pardon, Mr. Splint, but they weren't strays, and guinea pigs ain't covies!"

"Yes they were and yes they are! You never officially filed a claim of ownership on any of them, and 'cavy' is just a different name for 'guinea pig'!" He mumbled something I couldn't hear following this, interspersed with a string of curses.

"No, Splint, you *cain't* do that!" Talvi said, fear and emotion creeping into her voice.

"*Please* don't you tell Mr Frog on me! What if he kills me this time, hmm? He don't like me none anyhow!"

"Talvi, I don't have any choice. The security of this fortress is at stake."

"Joseph's the one you oughta be watchin' fer! He ain't no good, I know that fer sure now, I's seen it!"

Another mug hit the side of the door opposite my ear and my heart leapt into my throat. "Armok damn it!!!" I heard him swear. "You shouldn't even know about that!" Talvi broke down and began sobbing, causing Splint's volume to decrease past where I could hear it. Though I listened intently, I heard nothing more for a time... but then I heard footsteps. They came not from inside the room, but from around the farthest corner of the hallway, and almost immediately afterwards the shape of a dwarf came into view. My eyes widened as I realized who it was: Mr Frog.

I looked about frantically for some place to hide, and my eyes lit upon a darkened alcove that some novice miner had mistakenly carved into the dirt wall, only five meters away. I leapt up and made a dash for it, praying to the gods that Mr Frog hadn't seen me, and trying to slow my rapid breath. A minute later, Mr Frog was standing just down the hallway from me, knocking on Splint's door. I should have been afraid for Talvi's life, but I'm ashamed to say my rapid-beating heart betrayed the fact that at that moment I was more afraid for mine.

Mr Frog knocked twice, and the wooden slat in the door slid to the side, revealing Splint's eyes. "Splint, I have something I need to discuss with you," he said quietly. Splint shook his head and apologized. "Sorry, but I'm kinda busy with someone at the moment, Mr Frog - it'll have to wait." I almost sighed with relief. I'd fully expected him to give Talvi away.

"It's urgent..." Mr Frog insisted.

Sighing, Splint said, "All right, then - tomorrow morning. Will that work for you?"

With a brief nod, the tall, cloaked dwarf turned and walked away, and the slat closed back.

Staying far back and out of sight as much as I could, I followed Mr Frog to see where he would go. Though largely uneventful, the walk back kept me very much in suspense. I was sure that at some point he would turn around and stare me directly in the eyes.

Nothing like that happened, though Mr Frog's walk ended right where I had hoped it wouldn't: his room. After the door closed behind him, the sound of the lock sliding into place echoed down the hallway... a death-knell to my heart. With a shattered spirit I walked listlessly back to my quiet alleyway and collapsed on the little heap of rags I called a bed. Clutching my ragged quilt to me, I found no hope... only silent tears and an empty heart.

Yesterday, the day after the aforementioned events, I awoke late... far later than I usually do. After brushing out my hair and eating breakfast (a few half-stale plump helmet biscuits and some of the sewer brew from my waterskin), I felt a bit livelier than I had the night before. I didn't quite feel ready to take on the world... but I did feel ready to try to get my bracelet back.

After hiding my things behind a pile of mugs so they wouldn't get stolen - though I'm not sure who would bother stealing them - I straightened my little beanie on my head and left, headed for Talvi's room.

Knocking on the door gently to let Talvi know I was there, I looked around, my eyes lighting upon the same dwarf I'd seen the day before: the strong, gentlemanly one. Without thinking, I moved my hands to fix my hair, before I remembered that he probably wouldn't even care to look at me, which is what happened. He passed straight by without giving me so much as a glance. I've been told I'm pretty, but what good is it if nobody ever notices you?

After I finally decided that Talvi wasn't there, I entered her room myself, as I knew she never remembered to lock the door. The chest in the cavy room's tail was pulled back into position, hiding the little vent. Walking over to it, I pushed at the chest to try to get it to move, but found to my dismay that my arms were far too weak to manage it. Then I tried bracing my back against the wall and pushing with my feet, and slowly, slowly, the chest slid across the floor, revealing the iron grate behind it. The grate wasn't nearly as difficult to move, and after moving it to one side, I saw before me the gaping mouth of the blackened tunnel. If it had only been larger and looked more ominous, I wouldn't have felt quite so much like it was going to crush me to death after I entered.

It took me a few minutes to work myself up to it, but I did eventually manage to will myself to crawl inside: I closed my eyes and imagined my bracelet, puppies, large open fields, and a nice, hot meal. I couldn't move the chest back, but I made a point of putting the grate back in place before I continued down the tunnel.

It was a lot harder without Talvi leading the way. I was close to tears for much of it, and with my outstretched arms I could feel just how narrow the little shaft was. It doesn't help that I can't see nearly as well in the dark as Talvi can, but I did finally manage to stumble my way, hyperventilating, to where I had been before. This is where I realized that I hadn't thought my plan through all the way. Without my friend's "cavy nose" sniffing about, I had no idea where the traps were. Then I remembered the strong smell of the liquid the cavy tooth had been in, and, following Talvi's example, I sniffed along, trying to catch the faintest smell of anything. Twice I found something, and managed to disarm the traps without walking into them. The darts were small, but very, very sharp. They appeared to be spring-loaded into the tiniest mechanisms I've ever known of - only Mr Frog or Mekkia could've made them.

At the end of the tunnel I could just barely make out a metal grate, papered over on the other side. After calming my breathing with thoughts of open space directly on the other side, I waited for a few minutes, listening carefully for the slightest sound - any indication that Mr Frog might be in his room. I heard nothing, though, and assumed that he was in the middle of his meeting with Splint. Carefully lifting the grate from its stone slots, I set it down to the right and left the vent shaft almost eagerly, feeling so much safer now that I was in a larger room. It was Mr Frog's room, actually... Talvi had been right. It had a peculiar odor to it that I hadn't noticed the first time I had been inside: an odd burnt smell that was just barely detectable.

The first thing I did was place the iron grate back into its original position. It had a large sheet of thickened parchment attached to it, with various numbers, letters, and mathematical symbols scrawled across in columns. It was a disguise that had kept even Talvi from finding the grate the day before. When I was done, I turned away and surveyed the room.

Everything looked as we had left it the day before. I walked over to the dusty table with the strange glass equipment and looked it over... but my bracelet wasn't there. Glancing around, I saw that the door was locked, and that Mr Frog's bed looked slept in, though it was currently empty. But then I saw what I'd come for: a little glitter of gold on the nightstand by his bed.

A surge of hope ran through me as I went over to see, and I couldn't help but smile with joy as my eyes confirmed it: it was my bracelet, sitting safely in the middle of the table. I reached out to touch it, but heard the sudden snap of a cord, which startled me. I jumped back just in time to avoid being hit by a small volley of little darts springing from a nearby wall.

I was startled further by the sound of a familiar voice I'd grown to fear. "You're quick, little one..." Mr Frog was standing in the shadows on the other side of the room. "Not many people would be quick enough to avoid that... But you're not like most people, are you?" he said pointedly, not expecting an answer.

I realized in shock that he'd been waiting for me... watching me ever since I set foot in his room. I said nothing in response, but backed away, wondering how much he knew. I considered grabbing the bracelet and running, but was too afraid that he

might have set up more than just one trap.

He looked me over, almost curiously, and I shivered. As he slowly advanced and stepped into the light, my hands began shaking, and I found myself inching towards the door. More than anything else, I didn't want to share the grave of the guinea pigs after going through the untold horrors of Mr Frog's experiments.

"It's an excellent disguise, I'll admit, and not at all what I expected..." he continued in a menacing tone. "You can stay in the shadows, and yet in the open... No one sees you, but not because you're invisible, no... Rather because they choose not to. You have no need to hide because no one cares. No one knows who you are."

As I continued to back away, I suddenly heard a snap, and ducked instinctively.

Another volley of tiny darts whistled above my head.

He chuckled, a sound that filled me with more fear than even his rage would have.

Mr Frog never, ever laughed. "Not bad, not bad... You have fast reflexes." I got back up and continued backing towards the door, past the tables with alchemical apparatuses and odd machines, past the shimmering hoops. "No, no one cares to know who you are... But *I* know."

I shook my head negatively, but doubt began to creep into my mind. "No," I said in response, but my voice was barely audible.

"Yes, *I* know... Your jewelry betrays you. Vanya... An elvish name."

Tears of fear stung my eyes and I shook my head in disbelief as I tried to figure out how he knew my name, when the bracelet carried only my initials. "I'm not an elf," I whispered.

Suddenly he leapt at me, drawing a knife from beneath his cloak, which billowed out behind him as he flew through the air. I turned and ran for the door, and heard the familiar snap of a tripwire. It wasn't darts this time, but a horrible green gas that he seemed to be immune to. With one hand over my mouth and nose I unlocked the door in wild desperation and threw it open, dashing into the hallway with Mr Frog right behind me.

As I sprinted away, attracting the stares of passersby, I heard Mr Frog far behind, calling out to me: "*I will find you!* You cannot hide forever, little spy, and I have eyes and ears everywhere..."

I didn't stop until I'd reached the alleyway where I'd slept the night before. I bundled everything I owned inside my blanket and left. I knew if I stayed there he would find me almost immediately. The first skulker he met would be able to tell him where I was living. No - I knew that if I wanted to stay alive I would have to hide somewhere that no one would ever look.

The condemned garbage dump.

It had been sealed off years ago - originally Talvi herself had set it up when she was overseer of the fortress. The idea behind it was that dwarves could store items to rot in there instead of leaving everything in the hallways, so that miasma wouldn't be an issue. Unfortunately, nobody since ever used it: Mr Frog, during his term, had declared it a health hazard and sealed it off. But there are always ways past barriers, if you knew how to find them, and being homeless, I was one of those who did.

There are a series of natural tunnels that some creature had dug in the dirt levels, starting near the farms - one of them led directly to the old dump.

And so I set up camp here... and here I've been ever since. It's been a whole day now, at least. You can't hear the time bells here, but it feels like it's been forever. It's damp, smelly, and horribly cold, but I'd rather be in here than out where Mr Frog can find me. I almost feel like I could take a nap now, but there's something

*The text ends here abruptly, without Vanya's customary five-pointed star.*

## SPLINT:

[[Talvieno's note: So out-of-order it's not even funny anymore. Spearbreakers has a continuity snarl of epic proportions, unlike anything ever seen in a succession fort before. But if you read it like this... it almost makes sense.]]

*- Somewhere in the world, a dwarf sits behind a desk. While his attire is crisp and quite well made, from silver-dyed giant cave spider silk, he seems a touch annoyed, and appears to be waiting for something when a voice crackles on from a speaker in his desk.*

"Contractor T5-3-2367 Has regained consciousness and is coming to your office sir." The voice said in a distracted way. Likely the technician in charge of the mission going over accounts from other contractors. "I know his name Cavernsearched, you can just use that. How long must I wait?" The dwarf said back after pressing the response button. "Five minutes sir, the hospital is on the ground floor remember?" The hint of insolence was noticeable, and the dwarf didn't take kindly to it, but he ignored it all the same. "Fine. Casualties from the mission?" "34 contractors dead, 17 wounded, one Octavia in need of repairs and three Octavias lost. Enemy was killed to the man, a total of seventy bodies from the NPSC gathered up." Cavernsearched paused for a moment, the sound of slurping being heard. "But, their mission was successful if their mission accounts are anything to go by. Timestream Scanners show no abnormalities aside from weapon development picking up coinciding with the bioengineer's arrival a few years back, so any traces of our contractors or the enemy have been retrieved or destroyed, as ordered." Cavernsearched finished.

"Good. I want Response Team 3 to remain on alert status." the well-dressed dwarf said almost automatically. He needed his best Contractors available to take care of something. A few moments later, the double doors to his office opened and a man in equipment of Ballpoint Technologies origin, though he lacked his helmet and body armor, along with his midsection being bandaged. "You wanted to see me Mr. Bronzeclapsed?" The man said, standing at attention as best he could with his injuries. "Yes, I did. Mission went well I take it?" Bronzeclapsed said, gesturing to Ecem's injury. "Apparently, since I'm alive. If we'd failed none of us would have come back at all." Ecem responded. "Good, good. Well, I want you to get a new suit of armor and resupply. I need you and your Response Team to do a little scouting mission for me." Bronzeclapsed said in a polite tone. Ecem knew upmanage better. He had basically said his team was going on a joyful little skip into Parasol territory,

or gods forbid, Joseph's. With a 50-50 chance of death for him and his fellow Contractors. "Of course sir. What is it?" Ecem replied, trying to maintain composure though he wanted to tell what amounted to one of his bosses to go fuck himself with a rusted iron spike. "Well we seem to have hit a little.... Snag with a former 'employee' of ours, and things have continued to sour. He seems to be collecting certain person for something, And I'd like to know what." Bronzeclasp said, focusing his gaze on Ecem's eyes, as if he was peering into his soul. "You can count on us sir. Where are we heading?" As if on cue, a map appeared on the desk. It showed the entire northeast hemisphere of the world, and Bronzeclasp pointed at the former site of an old dwarven fortress. Labeled only as "Lokumokab." "Oh no...." Ecem said aloud. "Not there... Anywhere but there... That madman will kill us all no matter what countermeasures we have short of neutron bombs!" He said, not wanting to go where he'd set up his base. Sure it had once been a Parasol Industries dumpsite, but now you would have never known better. The fortress ruins were buried well away from the site proper, but still. Ghost stories from merchants who had to pass through the area sounded too convincing for even the most level headed national army troops. "Oh, if you went with a full 22 man team certainly. You'd be found and killed no problem. But I'm sending you and three contractors of your choosing, along with an outside contractor to deal with any unforeseen occurrences." Bronzeclasp said, keeping up his polite mask.

"Now I cannot stress how important it is you at least go undetected. Killing half of their engineering department would be fine and dandy so long as nobody notices until you leave. I am sending you out to gather information on the site's layout, and if you can, find what's left of Lokumokab. A friend of ours assures us that there are a few old escape tunnels from the facility's construction that come out in the ruins. They're in a rather sad state so getting in from there should be no issues with optical camo." Bronzeclasp said, turning off the map. "And transport?" Ecem said quickly. "An undesignated Moghopper will get you there and remain at the dropzone with the rest of your team besides those that go with you." Bronzeclasp replied matter-of-factly. 'Completely deniable.... Our markings will get incinerated and we'd just look like a band of thugs if we get shot down...' Ecem thought it was clever, sort of. At least he was using some logic, which is something for a dwarf. "Anything else we need to know?" He asked, trying to avert his gaze from the dwarf. "Not at all Ecem, good hunting." He said, lifting a mug to him. "Thank you sir. We'll be back quick as we can."

'So a joyful skip into a lunatic's backyard. Just great.' Ecem thought. "Just fucking great." he said under his breath as he walked down the hall to the lift.

**TALVIENO:**

**From the Journals of Vanya**



*You flip through the remaining "pages" of the shoddily-bound journal, but the rest are blank except for parts of cavy posters that had had the ink sanded away. You set it down on the table where you found it disappointedly, wondering what had happened to the aspiring writer who'd written out her tribulations. As you turn to leave, your gaze sweeps past the strange, dusty machinery, and something else catches your eye - lying beneath where you'd found Vanya's journal is a second book, with a five-pointed star etched lightly into the cover. A quick glance inside confirms your suspicion - most of the entries are written in Vanya's familiar, flowing script.*

I didn't get a chance to finish my last journal entry... I don't even know where my journal is, now, though I suspect Mr Frog has it. I'd been sitting against a wall in the condemned dump, when he leapt out from the shadows with a dagger in hand. The only reason he didn't succeed in killing me was that I threw my journal at his face as hard as I could, and though I did it more out of surprise than anything else, it seemed to catch him off guard enough to make him lose his balance. He slipped on some of the slimy animal skins and fell... I didn't stay long enough to see if he was all right, or even long enough to gather up my belongings. My journal had come apart when it hit him, and I knew there was no way I'd gather up the pages in time. I simply turned and fled. It feels like that's all I ever do now... I run and hide, and I leave all I care about behind me.

I ran partway down the length of the garbage dump and then ducked into a nearby giant mole tunnel, praying it wouldn't dead-end. It was small... about four feet high in most places. I don't mind earthen tunnels as much as I do stone, but I was still in a hurry to get out of there. I was glad at first to find it ended soon... and then I saw something I would rather not have seen...

The tunnel opened up onto an underground road that appeared to be abandoned, and I knew at once what I was looking at: the Spearbreakers wagon road. It was piled with all manner of humanoid corpses, some still clutching their weapons. In one darkened corner I remember there being an armored skeleton with five arrows stuck inside the face of its cracked skull. The whole corridor reeked of the dead... I can't imagine what the merchants in the caravans thought as random bones crunched against their wagon wheels.

I carefully worked my way past the grisly mess, avoiding stepping on any of the bones and hoping I wouldn't trip on anything. The last thing I wanted was to fall into a skeleton's open arms. But then I saw something that caught my attention: the well-crafted wooden dagger of a rich elven merchant. The hilt was shaped like three holly leaves, and it had tiny designs and elf-runes carved into it. I couldn't read what it said, but it still looked incredibly beautiful. I left it lying there, but it reminded me of what Mr Frog had said: *"Your jewelry betrays you. Vanya..."*. He'd called me an elf. The only worse insult among dwarves was to tell someone their father was beardless. Most dwarves swore by their father's beards, or in serious situations, by Armok's. But more importantly than the insult, he'd known my name... How did he know my name? The only person I'd ever told it to were my sister and Talvi... and my sister was dead. Did Talvi tell it to him - was she working with Mr Frog behind my back? Were they all conspiring to kill me just because they thought I was an elf?

My thoughts were rudely disturbed when I tripped over a large set of iron armor. Why they never collected it all after the battles, I don't know, but as I painfully got to my feet, I noticed a journal lying on the ground. A rusty iron gauntlet clutched it tightly, though the owner's hand was gone. Slipping it free, I glanced inside the front

cover out of curiosity.

The writer had a hard, jagged script, like he was trying to murder the page by seeing how hard he could press. He appeared to be an excellent artist, though, and the image he'd drawn of Spawn came very, very close to making me vomit. I hastily flipped through the rest of the journal, but there was only one entry. The rest was blank. I felt then that I'd found a temporary journal I could use, and, thanking the gods, I took it with me.

I sadly reflected on how the little journal was all I owned, and it wasn't even mine: I was just borrowing it from the dead. Everything else I owned I'd left with Mr Frog in the dump.

It's ironic, I suppose... I went on a mission to recover an item I'd lost, and it ended with me losing everything. Well... except my little beanie, which never left my head. At the end of the tunnel, something caught my eye. It was a gorgeous purple-bound book: "We See Deler Inkblushed, the Union of Haunts". It was near the bottom of a pile of skeletons, and almost covered over by a black cloak. I gingerly pushed the bones aside and opened it, and despite my sorry situation, I laughed in delight at what I saw within its binding. Someone had thickened the parchment and arranged it into special shapes... it was a "pop up" book. It had pictures of the necromancer who'd written it, along with many other pop-up pictures of zombies, skeletons, potions and cauldrons. It was a manual on how to resurrect corpses, and was intermixed with a very egotistical autobiography. Necromancy is forbidden and shunned among all civilized races, but I *love* books... and that one was so, so beautiful.

I was so absorbed in it that I didn't hear the dwarf who was approaching me from behind until he was only a few feet away. "Well, what do we have here?" he roared. I snapped the book shut and spun around in a fright, which escalated to near-terror as I realized who it was.

"I'm going to throw you outside the walls, you filth... The zombies can have your brains for their breakfast," he said with a scowl. It was Mitchewawa.

Despite how he'd inadvertently carved the basement class more homes in the walls, saying he loathed skulkers was an understatement. He took pride in how he'd managed to whip Spearbreakers into shape, and he considered us the most inefficient part of the fortress. "Parasites", he called us. Any of us he encountered on his solitary walks were typically never heard from again.

I really didn't want to join the zombies for breakfast, and as his heavy hand slammed down on my shoulder, I made my best attempt to swallow down my fear.

"Mitchewawa, sir," I said as sweetly as I could, though I could hear my voice tremble, "I have something you might want to see."

Not without a tinge of regret I handed him the book. I was smiling as prettily as I could, though he took no notice. As I watched, he turned it over in his hands, reading the runes on the cover and spine, and then he opened it. "Hrmph," he said, which was the closest he ever, ever came to a laugh, "this is a rare gem." He flipped through the pages idly, looking at the different pop-ups.

That was the last I saw of him. I didn't wait for him to finish... I darted up the ramp and into the fortress.

I hurried down the stairways and corridors until I came to Talvi's room, my heart pounding with fear and exertion. I didn't even think to knock as I threw the door open and rushed inside, almost tripping over Talvi, who was sitting just inside, playing with a paper calendar that looked suspiciously like one of Draigean's. If anyone could forgive an intrusion, it was her: she looked up at me and smiled. "V!

I's been wonderin' where you was, sweetie. Looked t'find you, and you wasn't where you *always* is."

Nodding, I closed the door behind me quietly and sat down against it, trying to slow my breath enough to talk. The stitch I'd gotten in my side didn't help things much.

"Yeah," I managed finally, "I had to move somewhere else."

She nodded. "Thass all right, just glad yer here now. I's been worried a tad 'bout you, y'know." She got up, walked over to an old oaken chest and began looking through it.

Somewhat pained, I managed to stand and follow her over, curious about how much she knew about my recent adventures. "Worried? Why were you worried about me?"

She laughed. "I went to go find you and saw *him* - Mr Frog - comin' outta yer alleyway. It was a right funny sight, it was - Mr Frog down there when he allus keeps t' himself."

I shuddered at the thought. "How long ago was that, Miss Talvi?" I asked.

She stopped shifting things around in the chest for a moment and stared blankly into space for a moment before saying, "I don't rightly know... Past few days, I'd reckon, but I don't care t'keep track o' time no more. You know that almost better'n anyone, V." She continued her search, finally drawing a little parchment envelope out of the bottom and holding it up triumphantly. "Ha!" she exclaimed with a wide smile, "found it!"

Curiously, I asked, "What is it?"

"Never you mind that, V, iss jes' somethin' you needa keep safe, all right?" Her tone grew more serious, though it still sounded playful due to her heavy accent. "V, I need you to listen careful. I'm gonna be doin' somethin' real dangerous soon. I dunno if I'll come back at all, but jus' you watch out fer when it comes 'round, all right? You cain't do nothin' suspicious'r let Mr Frog find you. If somethin' happens t'me, V, open it'n do what it says, 'K?'" She handed it to me, and then a puzzled look came over her. After thinking for a moment, she asked suspiciously, "Why's Mr Frog after you, anyhow?"

I couldn't meet her gaze, my eyes dropping downwards. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Miss Talvi..." I hesitated, fiddling uncomfortably with the envelope in my hands. Suddenly I looked up. "Do you remember when we went into Mr Frog's room?"

She seemed to have a bit of trouble recalling the event, but did nod, finally. "That I do. We was goin' after Joseph, t'get him back from Mr Frog. But we didn' manage... cavies were more important." Her brow furrowed at the memory, and her mood shift made me more uncomfortable than before.

"Well... I kind of left my bracelet in there by accident, and Mr Frog found it."

She exploded, something I wasn't expecting. "You did *what*?" she yelled. I backed away from her in fright at her anger. As she bore down on me, I stumbled and fell to the ground, the muscular, heavy-built woman towering over me. "You done gone and *left your bracelet there*?! V, girl, I's seen stupid in my day, but that beats all, worse'n a coconut monkey up a gum tree!" She approached me, scowling.

"I tried to get it back," I said, my timid voice scarcely above a whisper, "but Mr Frog was waiting for me."

"Well *o'course* he was waiting for you, you potato! That's allus how he do things, I'd know that better'n anyone! You didn' e'en come see me afore you went - I coulda tole you that!"

"I didn't get a chance, you weren't here!" Tears were forming in my eyes. To Talvi's mind, "potato" is a more serious insult than calling someone an elf. She hates potatoes.

Her voice was heavy with sarcasm. "Oh, I weren't here, so you thought you'd done go traipsin' along, happy as a flea's biscuit, uppity-up to Mr Frog's house to see if

you could get yer precious bit o' gold back, is that it? Well, now he knows someone's after 'im, and d'you know what Mr Frog does when he gets suspicious? Do ye?"

I shook my head, biting my lip as I brushed away a tear with my fingertips.

She stood directly over me now, fuming, her face contorted with anger. "Oh, I'll tell y'what 'e does. *He sets up traps!!* Now, when I go t' take care'f him, he's gon' be well-prepared, I tell you what. He'll be watchin' for someones, and it won't matter to him none that it'll be me, *nooooo*, it won't! Faster'n a dolphin's finger he'll chop me down! Mark my words, you... you..." her lips pursed as she tried to bring herself to form an appropriate insult, but she finally gave up and stomped away in disgust.

"Agh! Why you always gotta ruin *ever'thing*, V?!"

I watched her for a moment, it only now dawning on me what I'd done. It was unusual that Talvi had figured it out faster than me, but then again, she knew more about Mr Frog's habits than anyone in the fortress: she'd been romantically obsessed with him almost ever since he arrived during her year as overseer. "I'm sorry, Miss Talvi," I managed, my voice breaking with despair.

She spun to face me, scowling. "That don't cut it none, V! Get outta my sight afore I make you like a tree stump!"

I leapt to my feet and fled the room, tears streaming down my face. I was on the run for the second time today, and the fact that I was running from a friend made it so, so much worse.

I hid in a darkened alleyway near the stairs and sat down, clutching my knees close to me and trying to stem my tears. Everything that I'd considered safe was dangerous; everything I considered precious, gone. It was all because I'd tried to help Talvi in her mission against Mr Frog... and Talvi didn't even want to talk to me anymore. I didn't know what to do... I knew if I stayed in one place I'd likely be found out, but where did I have to go? Talvi was gone to me, and Sus was dead, too. Sus had been kind to the skulkers during his rule, a year ago. He'd actually been born into the basement class, and worked his way up from the bottom. He'd fought for our rights and privileges, and even started a food drive for the homeless. Despite being a soldier, he was a very sensitive dwarf. Not only that, but the old coot had had a soft spot for *me*... Maybe I reminded him of someone, I don't know, but I still considered him a friend. He was one of the best dwarves I'd ever known... and he hardly got a decent funeral. Even so, I'd attended it, and I'd cried for him.

My musings were broken almost before they began: Splint walked by, and I was suddenly struck with an idea.

Splint was considered the "Father of Spearbreakers" by most... he always had Spearbreakers' best interests at heart, and he would do anything to defend the fortress from any threat, no matter how small. If there was anyone at all who might still help me, it was him. I just hoped Mr Frog hadn't talked to him about me yet. Offering a prayer of thanks, I set out after him.

He moved quickly... so quickly that I was having trouble both keeping up and watching for Mr Frog. I was just beginning to worry about looking conspicuous with all my dodging about, when he turned down the hallway towards the dining room... somewhere I felt I'd be sure to be spotted. Looking back on it now, I wonder if maybe that was the reason he went in: it's a wide-open area, with no dark places to hide in... But I *needed* to follow him.

Doing my best to brave myself against my fears and look invisible, I snuck inside. There were dwarves talking in groups here and there, and one or two sitting and eating, but for the most part, the room was empty.

Splint sat down at a table in the far corner, right next to the kitchens, and began to work on some paperwork he'd brought with him. Deciding to seize upon this opportunity, I made my way towards him.... and that was when I saw my antagonist. Mr Frog was headed towards Splint as well. Not wanting my life to end, I hid in the nearest place available: the kitchens. Splint didn't notice me as I passed, thank gods, or he might've stopped me.

Mr Frog sat down across from Splint, who put away his books. I sat with my back against the inside kitchen wall, out of sight, and strained my ears for whatever I could hear.

"Glad to see you, Frog - how's the work progressing?"

"Let's skip the pleasantries, please. You know I don't have the stomach for it, or the time."

"Yes... sorry. Anyway, I have something I needed to talk to you about."

Staying low to the ground, I peeked one eye through the door and saw Mr Frog nod.

"I have some recent developments you'd be interested to hear as well."

"All right, then," Splint said, "I'll start. Talvi has spoken to me several times in the past few days, and while I'd initially promised her I'd keep it confidential, I think it would be in our best interests if you knew."

He took a sip from his mug and continued, drawing his eyebrows together and frowning. "To start out with, Talvi seems to remember an awful lot about Joseph - I'm not quite sure that amnesiac we gave her did its job."

I shook my head in disbelief. I was shocked. Splint was on Mr Frog's side?

Mr Frog interrupted him. "That is part of what I had to tell you. I have acquired a journal from the spy I mentioned when last we met. Most of it is clearly lies, but what it says about Talvi matches up to what I know almost perfectly. I have reason to believe Talvi may be planning to attack me."

My eyes widened at the word "journal" and I hid back behind the doorframe. That was the second time he'd called me a spy. I don't know where he got the idea, but it's all lies. Why would I be a spy?

Splint groaned. "Why didn't the amnesiac work? It *should've* worked - you said it would."

Mr Frog was silent for a moment. "I don't know... But I think I know who does," he said pointedly. I looked back around the doorway in time to see Mr Frog and Splint share a glance. Mr Frog nodded slowly.

Splint only groaned once more, putting his head in his hands. "Not again..."

"I'm afraid so."

Sitting up, Splint took a deep gulp of his beer. "Fine, contact him again. See what he can tell us."

"And if he can't fix this mess? What do we do about Talvi? She's a liability - we'll need to dispose of her."

Splint shook his head and took another draught. "Fine. We'll rig a cave-in. Frog, this is going way beyond what you said we'd have to do. This is a lot more than we bargained for - can't you see? We're in too deep..."

Folding his hands, Mr Frog responded, "I can't help that, Splint. There's more at risk than the life of a simple-minded individual. In war, there are casualties, and our young Talvi may be a necessary one."

In shock, I slid back behind the wall, slumping against it and trying my best not to breathe heavily; trying to keep from being loud, though I could not quiet my beating heart. They were plotting to kill my best friend, right in front of me... and there was nothing I could do to stop it. But then I heard something that piqued my interest.

"Mr Frog, what about the spy? Did you bring the bracelet?"

"Yes, here." I peeked around the doorframe again and saw Mr Frog reach under his

cloak and withdraw something wrapped in a piece of cloth.

Splint reached for it. "Let me see it." As it exchanged hands, I caught a glimpse of glittering metal. Splint looked it over carefully in his palm, and then held it up to the light... there's no doubt in my mind: it was *my* bracelet they were examining. It was so close to me then... yet so very, very far out of reach.

"I highly doubt it's as valuable as you claim," Splint said slowly, "but it's still a fine piece. Very good craftsmanship... But you're wrong on one count."

Even at a distance, I could see Mr Frog's brow furrow with displeasure. "And what might that be?"

Splint continued unheeding. "It's not of elven make. Any dwarf could tell you that... It's made of gold. Elves only use wood."

"But the script, the design... The initials..." Mr Frog insisted. I listened closely - I'd always wondered where my bracelet had come from. If the threat of Talvi's death wasn't weighing so heavily in my mind, I might have been excited to hear what Splint had to say.

His friend shook his head. "Well, yes... elves would never touch a hammer and tongs... and it's designed completely in the elvish style... it's something no dwarven blacksmith would make. We hate elves - you know that." He paused for a moment, puzzled. "I don't understand. This bracelet can't exist. The elvish style combined with the forging of metal - it's impossible. And you say it's the tool of an elvish spy..." He turned it over in his hands, shaking his head slowly and trying to work it out. Finally he sighed, handing it back to Mr Frog, who placed it back under his cloak. "Anyway, Frog, what news do you have on its owner?"

"I recovered her journal earlier, as I said. I almost managed to kill her, but she escaped. If she's anything, she's agile. I consider her a higher priority than Talvi - the spy needs to be eliminated." Now it was *my* death they were discussing. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I almost wished I could just run away and never have stumbled into the whole mess to begin with.

"Don't kill her," I heard Splint say, and for a moment I felt relieved.

"No?"

"I'll set out a 'capture and hold' mandate on her, along with a warrant for her arrest. We'll need to interrogate her."

There was a brief pause. "She might respond well to torture." I almost started crying.

I heard Splint sigh. "If you think it's necessary, Mr Frog, then do it. I just want all of this over with. I'm only doing this for Spearbreakers, do you understand?"

"Of course," Mr Frog said calmly. "You're doing just as you should."

With that, I heard the distinct sound of a stone chair scraping across the floor, and Mr Frog's footsteps fading into the distance. I got up and exited the dining room through the back way, so Splint wouldn't see me.

For once, though, I was putting someone else first. I *had* to warn Talvi. Mitchewawa may have hated skulkers, but he was a good dwarf. If she could talk to him and get his protection, I knew she might stand a chance. With this in mind, I headed back towards her room as fast as I could.



## HANSLANDA:

Hans woke from his sleep abruptly, unaware that someone was in his room. He sat up, and took a big swill from the mug next to his bed to clear the sobriety cobwebs from his brain. He burped and started to pull on a pair of socks when someone cleared their throat.

Hans look around his room, his cobalt eyes narrowed dangerously, "Whatcha be wantin'? And who are ye?" He spotted a shadowy figure standing by his door, leaning against the door jamb. The figure wore a long, flowing cloak over their tall frame, and Hans couldn't make out their facial features. "Well, come off it 'fore I get angry and wallop you." Hans picked up his very well made silver hammer.

"Hans, calm down. I need you to do something special for me." The voice was instantly recognizable to Hans, and he was, if not cowed by its authority, placated by it.

"Well, why didn't you just say so? Whatcha be needin' boss?" Hans smiled genially, his somewhat simple mind snapping back into a good mood rapidly.

"I need you to go down to sublevel forty-six and dig this out," The figure handed Hans a set of blueprints. "And link the supports to a lever I'll have you install afterwards on sublevel twenty-five. Soon."

Hans studied the blueprints, keenly interested in the architecture. "This won't be stable. If any of the supports fail, then a small mountain of stone will crush anything in that hallway."

"I know. I want you to do it though. I have my reasons."

Hans nodded belatedly, "Yessir. I'll get right on it. I'll come talk to you again when I've got it all finished, sir."

Splint smiled grimly, "You know where to find me, Hans." With that, the former Overseer left Hans' cramped quarters.

Hans stared at the blueprints for a long time, lost in thought. He had a incredible grasp of architecture and engineering, but anything else was quite beyond him. He knew exactly what the blueprints would look like when built, but for the life him, he couldn't figure out why master Splint would want such a hideously dangerous hallway built.

No matter, Hans got fully dressed and gathered his digging and building equipment.

## TALVIENO:

### **V's Journal: The Magic Brick**

*As you read, you note that this journal is remarkably different from the previous, and not just because of the fact that it's an actual book, and not pieces of cavy posters bound together with string. While the other had sentences circled in red ink and writing in the margins, the pages of this one are clean, besides the occasional blood spatter, and the word "HARD", which is repeated several times here and there in different handwriting. There is also a strange cut slicing across the back cover. Vanya had carefully written around these, though she was still using a charred stick to form her runes.*

I knew that Talvi probably wouldn't want me in her sight at the moment, given how angry she was at me, and I really, *really* hoped she wouldn't try to kill me... but I had to try to save her life. According to what I'd just heard, Mr Frog was likely going to try to murder her. Given how Splint was going to have *at least* the guards



searching for me, if not the entire population of Spearbreakers, this might be the last chance to warn her that I would have.

On reaching the stairs, I hurried farther down into the fortress, counting floors until I'd reached the apartment levels. (That's something else that sets Spearbreakers apart from other fortresses: the total lack of any "you are here" engravings.) I rushed down the hallways and pounded on Talvi's door as loudly as I dared, still fearing to attract attention. When no response came from within, I assumed Talvi was ignoring me, and I knocked a second time. I was panicking: it had been the first time I'd heard someone plot a murder, and I sure as anything didn't want it to become the first time a friend of mine died when I could've saved them.

Suddenly I heard footsteps coming from behind. I crouched against the door, hiding in the shadows as I watched someone turn and walk down the corridor opposite me: it was Mr Frog, rushing off somewhere. I didn't know where he was going, and for that matter, I wasn't sure I even wanted to know... but it was the last straw for me. I turned Talvi's knob and entered her room myself, uninvited, for a second time that day, praying to the gods she wouldn't hurt me in her rage.

However, what I found surprised me: Talvi wasn't there. I wasn't sure when she could've left, as I hadn't even been gone an hour, but there was no doubt in my mind: she wasn't in the room. I quickly decided to leave and find her myself, with the hope that I would be able to track her down before Mr Frog could. Just before I turned to leave, I noticed that the chest in the cavy room's tail had been moved aside, and the grate was lying on the floor. I remembered what Talvi had said: "*Now, when I go to take care of him...*" She'd been yelling at the time, but it made little difference. She was going to try to kill him, and it looked to me as if she was already on her way to do it.

Foreboding filled me. I knew what would happen when Talvi attacked him, and I didn't like it: Mr Frog would be prepared, just as he had been when I'd met him. He hadn't even known who I was, and had only had one night to prepare for me, and he'd *still* almost managed to take me down. But it had been less than three hours since I'd thrown my journal at him in the condemned dump... I figured that maybe how brief a time he'd had to prepare would be enough to tip the balance in Talvi's favor. But the more I thought about it, the more I knew: Talvi didn't stand a chance. When it came right down to it, she had an almost superstitious fear of Mr Frog - for instance, she believed he'd designed a poison just for her: "cavy poison". All Mr Frog would have to do to have the upper hand would be to pick up any liquid-filled glass and act like he'd dump it on her.

I bit my lip. I didn't want my friend to die, whether she hated me or not. I did have another idea, though my timid mind shied away from it: maybe *my* being there would be enough to tip the balance in her favor. The only problem was, I didn't really want it to be in *anyone's* favor. I didn't want anyone to die, but I knew that the longer I hesitated, the less chance I'd have of saving anyone.

With rapid heartbeat, I approached the little blackened tunnel for the third time, noticing that the chest was half-blocking the entrance, almost as if someone had tried to pull it back into position from within the shaft. I set myself down against the wall to push it aside, groaning inwardly at the task. It was a lot harder the second time: I'd been running a lot, and my legs were tired. Before, I'd had a good night's sleep to work on. Suddenly in frustration I stood and

threw open the chest, the wooden lid clattering on the floor, and what I saw made me gasp. It was full of metal... beautifully designed weapons and various pieces of chain-link armor. I'd heard a rumor that Talvi had been in the military before she arrived with Splint at Spearbreakers... Perhaps, as unlikely as it seemed, it was true. Unfortunately, whether it was true or not, she'd left her weapons and armor here instead of taking them with her, so they'd be of no use.

Suddenly I was struck with an idea. Talvi might not use them, but *I* definitely could. I had no skill in combat, but I knew I'd have more of a chance at defending myself if I had a weapon. I reached into the chest and tested the weight of various pieces. The armor was too heavy for me to lift, and the jeweled axes felt heavy in my hands, but I found a dagger near the bottom, made of a silvery metal. It was beautifully designed, and it reminded me of the elven weapon I'd found in the wagon tunnel. Picking it up, I tested it out, and was surprised to find that it rested so comfortably in my palm; I almost felt it had been made just for me. After digging around until I found another that matched it, I tucked both blades away at my waist. With slightly strengthened confidence, I braced myself against the wall once more for a final push at the heavy chest.

Unfortunately, I'll admit my recently-won confidence drained away when I peered into the darkness again, but I steeled myself against it, thinking the same thoughts as before, and went inside. I couldn't help my fast-paced breath, or the tear I wiped from my cheek, but I was moving forwards. I hoped that was enough.

As I neared the end of the tunnel, I heard someone speak. It startled me, and my heart leapt into my throat, but I made myself crawl around the last bend... and then I stopped in surprise: the papered-over grate in Mr Frog's room had been moved. Within the tunnel I was deep in shadows, but if someone was to peer inside, they would almost certainly see me.

"But of course!" said a man I'd never heard before. "I'd be more than happy to assist you. Simply state what you desire, Mr Frog, and I'll do my very best." The voice sounded friendly... so friendly that it made my stomach turn. To me, it sounded like an act, and I dreaded meeting the speaker. Then I heard another voice I knew I'd dread meeting even more.

"I'm only doing this so that I have more options at hand." It was Mr Frog himself. I crept a little farther down the tunnel and looked inside the room. Mr Frog was standing by a table, holding something in his hand and looking at it with an expression of annoyance.

Someone laughed joyfully. I looked around, with what limited vision the tunnel offered me, but the person it came from appeared to be out of my field of vision. "Of course, of course! A one-time favor. You understand, though, that I never grant favors without expecting a favor in return." I could imagine a face smiling sweetly as those words were said.

It was only then that it hit me: I'd come all that way for nothing. Talvi wasn't there, and there was no sign that she'd ever even been there at all. Still... I thought that perhaps I might get my bracelet back.

Mr Frog's brow furrowed and he frowned. "I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important."

"You would not, no, but you're in luck, my friend. I already know what it is you would ask!"

"You usually do," Mr Frog replied tersely.

"Ah, I see, I see - it is something you have come to expect of me, is it not? Do you still doubt me? We would work well together, you know."

Mr Frog's expression darkened. "I told you not to mention that again until I'd had more time."

"My mistake, my mistake. Now, what you desire is a grade four amnesiac for your young woodcutting friend, is it not? You would also like to inform me that the previous dose you administered was ineffective, and had unusual effects. Have you studied these effects, my dear Mr Frog?"

"I have not." Mr Frog seemed to hate admitting it, but a new hope surged through me: maybe he didn't want to kill Talvi after all. He was asking a friend for an amnesiac that would actually work. I hated the idea of Talvi forgetting anything forever, but it was far, far better than her death.

The voice continued. "Ah, shame, shame. You ought to have, like the scientist you are, my good friend. But! Not to worry, not to worry. I already know what it is that happened, and have prepared for it."

"But what -"

"No need to speak, my friend, I will explain. You've performed many experiments on the woman, have you not?"

Mr Frog nodded slowly. It only then dawned on me: he was nodding and talking to the little brick of metal he was holding. "You know I have," Mr Frog said in annoyance. "Why bother asking?"

"It is a scientist's job to ask questions. You know that, dear friend. Tell me - did it ever occur to you that you might've altered our young Talvi's DNA? That her chromosomes might not be the same as those of an average dwarf's?"

I didn't understand a word he said, though Mr Frog seemed to. "Yes, of course I did. It was what I was going for."

"Did you design the amnesiac you administered to overcome these alterations?" The voice had taken on an almost motherly tone, which sounded bizarre in my ears.

The expression on Mr Frog's face could only be described as defensive. "I didn't have the equipment necessary, and what I have here is too primitive. Look, are you going to provide me with it or not? I need it quickly, and I don't have all the time in the world, unlike you."

I imagine the owner of the voice didn't even bat an eyebrow at Mr Frog's rudeness.

"Patience, patience, my dear friend. I, too, am a busy man. But I know you have an event of great importance happening in... what is it now... thirty minutes?"

"How do you know these things?"

"I see all," the voice said slowly. "The drug you desire will be at drop zone 21-Alpha in approximately... two minutes. I won't ask your favor now, my friend, but I assure you I will not forget it." I heard an odd sound, and Mr Frog placed the little tablet on the table in front of him, shaking his head. Drawing his cloak about him, he turned, marching briskly to the door. Moments later, he was gone.

Cautiously, I crept all the way to the end of the tunnel. I waved my arm about inside his room, jerking it back towards me just in time to avoid several volleys of glass darts coming from different directions. Slowly, cautiously, I poked my head out and looked around carefully for traps. I saw none, but felt a sinking feeling that if there were any traps in the room at all, I wouldn't be able to see them until it was too late. Even so, I entered Mr Frog's room, though not without hesitation. I glanced at his nightstand, as if my bracelet might still be there, but it was as I'd expected. If my bracelet was in the room, he'd hidden it somewhere else.

I walked slowly past the different tables, looking each of them over carefully for any glimpse of my little keepsake. Almost everything looked untouched since I'd been here last, with the exception of some of the glass equipment and machinery on the closer tables. Those at the farther sides of the room, back in the shadows, looked almost as if they hadn't been touched in years.

It startled me so terribly when I heard it that I almost fell over: a ringing sound, like bells, but different and clearer. Out of curiosity, I sought out the source, and what I found mystified me. The object making the sound was a little blue-silver brick of metal, but the interesting thing wasn't the coloration, or even the unusual shape, but the fact that scrolling across the flat pane of glass embedded in its surface were dwarf runes made of nothing but colored light.

"Magic..." I whispered in awe. I'd heard of it before, and believed the stories, but until then I'd never actually *seen* magic in action.

The runes continued to dance past, and the bell sound beeped urgently. I read the scrolling text: "Tap to accept call."

I decided to try to make it stop making noise. I was sure it could be heard in the hallway outside the door, and besides that, I knew Mr Frog could be back at any moment. I picked it up, trying to find a lever on the side, or a pressure plate I could push to make it stop. Suddenly I heard a familiar voice.

"Ah, at last. It took you long enough to answer..." I almost dropped the little device in surprise, but managed to keep a hold on it, turning it around until I saw the face of the speaker, whose face appeared, animated, on the glass pane.

He had a perfect face: a chiseled chin, smooth cheekbones, and eyes set perfectly; everything about him was symmetrical. It rather reminded me of the perfection in the portraits artists would engrave on walls and floors. In a sense, it seemed... artificial. His face didn't look dwarven at all, but rather human, and the expression was almost one of disgust.

"Are you not going to speak? Are you deaf, are you mute? Are you... blinded by my radiance?" he asked with heavy sarcasm. It was the same voice as the person had who'd talked to Mr Frog, but the tone was entirely different now.

"H... hello..." I managed timidly, in barely more than a whisper. Someone was using magic to talk to me... it was incredible, but scary at the same time. I had a hard time looking past that fact and listening to what the man was saying.

"Ah, there you go. I knew you would be there to answer the call. I only hoped you possessed the... intelligence... to actually respond."

I hardly noticed the insult, and asked quietly, "Why are you talking to me?"

"You don't need to hold the tablet so close to your face..." he said. I apologized and moved it farther away, trying to match how Mr Frog had held it. "Thank you..." he said slowly. Then he continued, "I've been watching you for some time. You've done exactly as I expected - no more, no less. You've actually furthered my cause greatly - far more than the dull-witted Talvi ever managed." He said this last with extreme distaste.

Realization swept over me. "You're Joseph..." I said in astonishment.

His face never changed, but I imagined a smile twitching at the corner of his mouth.

"Ah, you figured it out. Good for you, good for you. Unfortunately, I regret to inform you that I no longer have need of your assistance." He glanced downwards for a moment, as if reading something, and then back up at me. "You're a liability now, Vanya. Do you know what that means?"

Fear gripped my heart again, and I had to force myself to remain calm. "You're going to kill me, aren't you..." I whispered.

"Yes, of course, of course," he replied in his slow, unamused tone. "A common lab rat would have the sense to figure that out, though you're wrong in one respect: I'm not going to be the one to kill you. You see... I have other people carry out my wishes. When those people cease to be of aid, I have them terminated by my *other* assistants, and I like it best when those other assistants don't realize they're only doing what I wished them to - just like you've been doing for the past week." He paused, and for a moment I felt sure I saw a smile twitch across his face.

"Did you realize at any point in the past week that you were simply a pawn? Did you realize you were expendable; did you realize you were only doing the bidding of another? Of course not, of course not. The lab rat never wonders what is outside its maze; it only goes straight for the cheese at the end."

I shook my head in horror. Everything had started making sense.

"It's *you*... *You're* the enemy Talvi told Splint about, and you're manipulating Mr Frog into doing what you want him to! Almost as if... almost as if he's only a pawn to you, too... just like me..." I couldn't believe it. How could someone who used magic be so, so evil; how could *anyone* have so little respect for the lives of other people? How could *anyone* care for nothing but their own gain?

He smiled in wry amusement. "Ah, little Vanya... You foolish young woman... This is exactly why you're a liability. Your cause opposes mine, and I knew you would come to that conclusion eventually. You know too much. I only let Splint live because as he and Mr Frog work together, the whole of Spearbreakers works, more or less, for me."

I shook my head violently as I clutched the lightweight tablet in my hands. "No," I said, unwilling to accept it. "You can't kill me, you won't!" I paused. "And Mr Frog won't, either," I added, though I doubted the truth of that last.

He smiled again. "Ah, and now I can answer your original question: 'Why are you talking to me?'. You see, my young friend, while we spoke, I delayed you long enough for the method of your execution to arrive."

I heard a noise: the sound of someone unlocking the hallway door from outside.

"Goodbye, and pleasant dreams, little rat," Joseph said with a sardonic smile, and his image faded from the tablet, which went black in my hands.



## TALVIENO:

### **V's Journal: The Frog Battle**

*This is a journal borrowed from the dead by the dwarf, Vanya. Despite how much danger she was in during her previous entries, the fact that her flowing script continues on the following pages indicates that if nothing else, she was still alive to write it.*

I had always thought of magic as purely good, used by the kindest-hearted wizards in the world. I believed it the stuff of legends... of knights in shining adamantite armor fighting the dragons who sought to eat dwarven maidens. I thought it the stuff of kings and fortresses, of mines and forges, of dense woodlands protected by crossbowmen in exile. Yet I believed every bit of it to be true, ever since I was a little child... as far back as I can remember, really. When I saw it for myself, I wasn't confused, or bewildered, but excited. It was only fate's cruel irony that my first encounter with it was due in part to the most evil person I've ever known... and he who I now consider my greatest enemy.

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Even as Joseph's face faded from the glass embedded in the little magical tablet, the door to the hallway opened. It was who I feared it would be: Mr Frog, carrying a bag under his arm. He saw me almost instantly, and scowled with hatred. "You..." he

said darkly, slamming the door behind him. When he saw the tablet in my hands, he fumed with rage. I put it down as quickly as I could, but he'd placed his bag down on a table nearby and was already advancing towards me.

I'm ashamed to say that retreat was the first thing in my mind: I glanced behind me at the tunnel to Talvi's room, but knew that if I tried to escape through it, he'd be sure to catch up with me.

When I turned back, Mr Frog was only five feet away from me, and was taking down some kind of sword from the pillar beside him. I was stunned by what I saw next: when he swung it in a ">" shape as if to test it, it rattled to life, and the edges of the sword flickered in the torchlight. It was magical, and it made a horrible metallic sound like so many clinking chains.

I backed away from him slowly, afraid of what he might do.

He didn't follow me, but stayed where he was in the shadow of the pillar. "Don't worry, little spy..." he said, watching me carefully as I backed towards the passage entrance on the floor. "This will all be over sooner than you think." Saying this, he placed a hand on the pillar beside him and pulled a lever.

My shoulder stung briefly, and I looked downwards to see that two tiny darts had pierced the sleeve of my blouse and stuck themselves in my shoulder. I yelped in surprise and pulled them out, tossing them to the floor as Talvi's words echoed in my mind: *"He's gonna be well-prepared, I tell you what."* I looked at him, shaking my head in shock: Splint had told him I was to be captured, not killed! "You can't kill me," I said weakly, imagining the poison pouring through my veins. If he'd poisoned me, I'd have at best just a few minutes to live, unless I could find some kind of antidote.

The edges of his dark cloak brushed lightly against the floor as he advanced towards me, holding the magical steel sword at the ready in his hand. "No, Vanya," he said scornfully, "Splint wanted me to spare your life, but there are some things he can't understand. I know you're a spy, but you're not the spy he believes you to be, and you pose no threat to him. Interrogation would only tell him things he can't know or understand. I know who you are... and you need to die."

I looked around desperately for some means of escape, but Mr Frog was approaching me more rapidly now. Suddenly I remembered what I carried at my waist, and pulled the daggers out. They flickered beautifully in the dim torchlight of Mr Frog's room, but it was small comfort to a girl doomed to die.

Mr Frog slowed for a moment, looking at the weapons in my hands. "You come armed..." he mused, "This will be interesting... but it will still be brief." He charged, swinging the sword in an arc downwards towards my head.

I cringed, holding the knives up in an "X" to block, and as the sword came down, it almost ripped them out of my hands. My arms vibrating, I looked up at Mr Frog's face, and saw yellow sparks from the crossed weapons raining down around me. Too late did I realize why Mr Frog had stopped attacking: with his free hand, he pulled the beanie from my head, revealing my pointed ears peeking from behind my hair.

I flushed crimson, but he took no notice. "Vanya Carena, the elf," he said slowly, with a sort of grim satisfaction. "Your file was so easy to find. Trainee spy of Ballpoint Technologies, I presume, here to collect information on my whereabouts and progress?" As he stepped away from me, the sparks ceased, and he tossed my little hat to the side. "Information like the blueprints from my journal that you stole and blamed on poor Talvi... It's fortunate that that's going to be the last thing you steal." He charged again, swinging the humming blade. I tried to leap aside, but the sword caught the edge of my blouse, tugging at it as it cut. "And you can't even fight!" he finished with a dry smile.

Apprehensively, I felt for blood, but found to my relief that I was uninjured. He had hit in the spot that I'd tucked my journal, and that had possibly saved me from being

cut. "That's not who I am," I said, trying my best to raise my voice above my drumming heart.

Had he been anyone else, I'm sure Mr Frog would've rolled his eyes. "Come now, it will all be over soon. Wouldn't you like to speak the truth for once?" He stepped forwards and swung again. I dodged it, barely, but stumbled backwards and fell. The blade whirred down towards my chest, and I rolled to the side, jumping to my feet and holding out my weapons in defense, which seemed so small in comparison to his sword.

"I'm not who you think I am!" I shrieked in fright, trying to get away, without taking my eyes off my aggressor. "I'm just 'Vanya'! I don't even know who my parents were!"

He walked towards me at a brisk pace, his cloak fluttering out behind him. "Your file said as much, Carena. Your faked journal wasn't *all* lies, but the little sister never existed - not in the lists of Ballpoint or Spearbreakers."

My sister, I thought. As he struck out at me again, I twirled towards his left, striking twice with Talvi's daggers as I spun. I felt my ragged linen skirt swirling about my knees; felt my hair whipping about my face. As his blade came down for a second pass, I held up my knives and deflected it to the side. Hope sprang forth anew, and I almost smiled: years ago, my little sister and I used to play at swordfighting with sticks. I was out of practice, but I hoped it would be enough of an edge to keep me alive. The memory of her fueled me and renewed my confidence.

Mr Frog stopped, stepping back and examining the two slashes in his cloak. He looked up at me with a deadly fury in his eyes, but now I was almost able to brush it away. "My name isn't Carena," I said defiantly, and he rushed me again.

It came easier now: he struck, I twirled and spun; he sliced, I caught his weapon and sent it to the side. My breath was heavy, and I was still scared as anything, but I was alive.

Mr Frog stopped for a moment and looked at me - what was it I saw a hint of in his eyes? Admiration? Approval?

"Very nice," he said in his deep voice, "This is a bit closer to what I'd expect of you." He turned and tapped the wall next to him.

A blade swung down from the ceiling towards my face.

I flipped backwards to avoid it.

Despite the fear I was in, that made me angry... it was an unfair move: something I could neither block nor deflect, and I'd had no warning or reason to expect it.

Grabbing up some of the corked bottles from the nearby tables, I flung them at him, hoping they would explode and set him on fire or something. He dodged most of them, but the last one broke as he blocked, splattering the contents over his weapon. "Stop! You fool, stop!" he yelled.

I threw another, but it missed, bouncing off the machinery to the right of him and shattering on the floor. A sky-blue liquid rushed out, splashing his cape and hissing over the stony floor, which it seemed to sink into. It shimmered as it faded away, leaving an almost mirrored surface on the stone.

I glanced back at Mr Frog, who was seething with hatred. "And that's *exactly* what I'd expect of you," he spat out through clenched teeth. "You mindless brutes of Ballpoint Tech - all you can accomplish is petty thievery and senseless destruction!" He swung his sword in an arc and stormed towards me, his rattling blade smoking and throwing sparks. His cloak, torn and billowing behind him, shimmered with a pale blue light from the liquids I'd thrown. "But why aren't you dead yet?!" he yelled, and swung the sword towards me with both hands.

I ducked away from it, rolling to my feet behind him and striking with my dagger, but I only carved another slash across his cloak.

He spun, swinging his sword again and again. It was all I could do to deflect it and keep from falling over as he backed me towards the wall.

Suddenly my bare feet hit something that felt less than solid... I glanced downwards and saw I was sliding across the shimmering floor where the flask had shattered. I looked back up just in time to catch the sword between my crossed knives.

As we slid backwards across the mirrored surface, Mr Frog forced his sword closer and closer to my head with both his hands, his face contorted with rage. Sparks were flying everywhere from his sword, and a strange blue smoke was rising from it towards the ceiling. I knew I couldn't keep it up much longer... I was almost spent, and he was a lot stronger than I was.

Reaching the edge of the slippery patch, I felt friction beneath my feet once more, quickly ducking and leaping to the side. Mr Frog's sword hit the floor with a clang, and the rattling noise it was making began to sound strained. Without waiting to see why, I struck out at him, slashing several times and praying I'd be able to hit him for once... but I didn't.

"You can't even hit me!" he mocked, and as I backed away in fear, he straightened, regaining his composure. Leaping at me, he struck again. I caught his blade and sent it to the side.

"They kept you, and got rid of me," he said as coolly as if making dinner conversation, though I could see the hatred in his eyes. "I have practically no official combat training, and I still have the upper hand. Not only that, but I doubt you even understood any of what you stole."

He struck again, but I spun away from the blow.

"They were going to terminate me - did they tell you that? An occasional drink or smoke never hurt anyone, but they were going to kill me for it. Yet they keep you... and you're nothing but a pretty face."

It was an insult I'd heard before, but one that always hit particularly close to home. It hurts like anything when people can't look past your appearance to see what you're capable of, and I snapped, throwing one of my daggers at him. With reflexes like lightning, he blocked with the flat of his blade. Somehow the dagger seemed to entangle itself in the edge of his sword, which fell silent, its rattling and throwing sparks abruptly coming to an end.

Mr Frog examined the blade with a critical eye.

I swallowed involuntarily. I'd just foolishly thrown away one of my weapons, and I knew that just one would never be enough to defend myself with. As fear began to grip my heart, Mr Frog spoke.

I expected anger, but he seemed collected, though somewhat annoyed. "I should thank you," he said slowly, hanging the damaged weapon on the pillar where it had come from. "You just did me a great assistance with my research, though you didn't know it. I've needed to test that weapon's breaking point in a combat situation for some time now. However," he added, removing another weapon from the wall, "you've destroyed much of my equipment, and made a great mess of my laboratory." As he looked over his new weapon - a pike with a geared blade like a saw at the butt end - he continued, his brow furrowing with contained loathing, "Not only that, but you're taking *far* too long to kill. I have somewhere I need to be in a very short time, and now I'm running behind schedule."

Suddenly the saw on the pike whirled to life like magic, spinning so fast I couldn't see the teeth. I watched it for a moment in terrified fascination, and he leapt at me. My confidence was gone, and it was all I could do to dodge the wide arc that the saw-pike could cleave through the air. Only moments later I was forced to block as the blade came at me sideways. I leapt out of the way, but the toothed gear ripped the dagger from my hands, throwing it at the ceiling, which rippled almost like water

as the weapon bounced off it. I gasped, wondering what magic it was that Mr Frog practiced in such secret.

Stepping forward, Mr Frog swung again, and I threw myself backwards onto my hands to avoid it, yelling in fear as the blade screamed over me, inches from my face. I tried to get to my feet again, but he was already upon me, holding it inches from my chest. I backed away, looking for something I could grab - anything - to throw at him, but my groping hands found nothing, and I found myself backed against the hallway door.

Mr Frog held the spinning blade steady inches from my neck. I tilted my chin upwards, fearing it'd be cut apart. "But why aren't you dead yet?" he asked slowly, but he sounded more curious than loathing.

Tears began to stream down my cheeks. I didn't want to die. I didn't want *anyone* to die, really, but especially not me. I could feel the wind on my neck from the spinning saw blade Mr Frog was holding so near, and I knew I only had moments to live.

"Really, why aren't you dead?" he questioned with furrowed brow, examining me with the curious eye of a scientist. "The biochemical in those darts should've done its job by now... Why hasn't your kill switch been activated?" He paused, tilting his head. Then, louder, he asked me, "What did you do? What did they give you?"

Blinking back my tears, I whispered, "Maybe I'm not who you think I am."

For a moment, I saw a glimmer of hope that he might spare my life, but it was gone when he responded: "Perhaps so. Perhaps you're just an elvish spy, as Splint thought. But either way... after all you've seen... you know too much." He drew back the sawpike, spinning the sharp end around to face me. As it swung back towards my chest, I screamed in terror.

But I wasn't the only one who screamed: from behind Mr Frog came a horrible war-cry in a voice that I recognized instantly: it was Talvi.



TALVIENO:

V's Journal: The Return of Cavywoman

This is a stolen journal. It has its moments of dullness and the runes are flowing. You cannot help but wish it had been a pop-up book like the one Mitchewawa had claimed credit for finding.

I know I ended the last entry on a bit of an exciting point, but dinner had arrived. Still... I don't have much else to do, so I'm just going to continue with what I had been writing. I don't want to forget to write anything down, as I still want to get this published so that people can read it. I don't really need the money right now, but it would be nice if people at least knew my story. It would make it all feel worthwhile... even if it couldn't make any of it better. Maybe it's just a fantasy I'd be better off without, but I can't help it.

~~~

Just as Mr Frog prepared to stab me through the heart with the spear point of his sawpike, Talvi leapt from the shadows behind him, yelling, "FOR MAH CAVIES!!!" I don't know how long she'd been watching us, to time her leap so perfectly, but it

caught Mr Frog by surprise. He spun, holding the shaft of the sawpike between two outstretched hands, and just barely managed to catch the handle of Talvi's axe against it, staggering backwards under the weight of the blow.

The newly-sharpened blade of Talvi's well-worn woodcutting axe glinted in the torchlight as she drew back for another strike, but Mr Frog got out of the way as it came down, snatching a package from a bag on a nearby table as he went. He ripped away the parchment wrapping, revealing a cylinder of glass with a tiny needle at the front: a syringe. Mr Frog had invented them just this past year, and gotten Mitchewawa's new doctors to use them at the hospital. I assumed the amnesiac was contained within the one he held, as he seemed to be looking for an opening in Talvi's defense so that he could use it.

"Mr Frog!" Talvi yelled, stalking towards him with axe drawn over her shoulder. She wore no armor, but looking back now, I'm not sure how her pudgy form would've been able to fit into it - especially not the slender-fit armor in the chest in her room. "Mr Frog, you killed mah covies! You knocked me over th' head jes' like any right mugger, and now you're tryin' t' kill mah V girl!" She gave me a wink before laying another crushing blow towards Mr Frog from the side.

Mr Frog managed to block with the shaft of his sawpike, but just barely. The weight behind Talvi's axe nearly knocked him off his feet, and he dropped the little syringe, which rolled across the floor and into a darkened corner.

"Talvi, I did what I had to for the sake of science, and I had Splint's permission to do it," he said, stabbing the spinning blade towards my friend, who easily knocked it aside with her weapon. "As to hitting you over the head, I'm sorry, but you stole my PEA and you weren't supposed to know about it!" He sounded less confident now than he had while fighting me.

"That don't matter none! I dun even know what one'f them P-E-A's is, nohow!" Talvi struck at him again and he jumped aside, trying to get to the little needle, but Talvi saw what he was after. She rushed forwards, swinging like a mad woman (which she possibly still was), and Mr Frog retreated. Upon reaching the syringe, she crushed it under her foot.

That seemed to make Mr Frog switch gears. "Talvi, I wanted to settle this without bloodshed, but now you've left me no choice." Saying this, he swung the screaming blade of his sawpike towards her, but she batted it down.

Talvi jumped away from the blade as it came around for a second pass, albeit somewhat clumsily. She seemed no stranger to the weapon, possibly from all her stalking of the dwarf. Backing farther away, she screamed back at him, "Well you ain't ne'er killed nobody! Heard you tell Splint so myself, and I don't bet worth a cloud's stomach you could kill me now!" She stood defiantly in the middle of the room.

I was frozen in terror. I didn't want either one of them to be killed, despite the fact that Mr Frog had been trying to kill me only moments before. If Talvi killed Mr Frog, she'd be executed for her crime... it was the dwarven way of dealing justice.

Mr Frog approached her at a run, his torn and battered cloak fluttering behind him. Talvi dodged the spinning blade and got in closer, swinging her axe as if she was trying to fell a tree. Mr Frog spun his shaft and blocked, and though he took a step back, he didn't stagger. "Talvi, I can do anything I set my mind to." He knocked her axe aside with the pike end and stabbed towards her. She leapt backwards, but not in time to avoid the pointed metal.

I screamed.

Talvi seemed to grow even angrier, though, and grabbed the shaft with her oversized

hand, trying to wrest it from Mr Frog's grasp. The silvery glint of chain mail showed through the jagged hole in her shirt.

They struggled together: As Mr Frog tried to keep the spinning blade behind his shoulder from cutting into him, Talvi pulled, bringing him and his weapon in closer. Then she released it, for a two-handed downwards swing of her axe towards his head.

Mr Frog got under the sawpike's shaft, just in time to catch Talvi's weapon and throw it to the side. Standing, he jabbed towards her again, and Talvi countered with a swing of her own. As Mr Frog stepped away from it, he nearly lost his footing, sliding across the shimmering substance I'd spilled on the floor minutes before. Talvi followed in a fury, laying down one strike after another. He blocked and parried, but suddenly reached to the side and grabbed a vial of liquid.

My friend stopped. "Mr Frog, don't you - " Her words were interrupted as the glass shattered at her feet, splashing onto her legs. "Cavy poison!" she screeched, leaping backwards from it in dismay. I got up and moved to where I could have a better view, and bit my lip as I saw that her legs seemed almost to be smoking.

Mr Frog reached for another vial, but with a scream of rage Talvi charged him like a bull. He swung his sawpike towards her, but she batted it aside as a minor nuisance. "Mr Frog!" Talvi screamed, readying for another strike, "*I loved you!*" she swung her weapon towards him in a wide arc, slicing open some of the strange machinery on the table beside them, which erupted in flickering lightning and a shower of sparks. "I'll admit that potion did more than I expected it to!" Mr Frog caught the axe's handle with the shaft of his weapon, his reflexes as sharp as ever, and sent his saw blade down towards her head with as much force as he could. She blocked with the handle of her axe above her head, but almost couldn't hold it.

They stood there for a moment, glaring at each other in fury, panting from exertion. Sweat poured down their faces, beginning to stain their clothes, as sparks flew from the machines and another shower of them cascaded downwards from their crossed weapons. The shimmering surface of the mirroring floor caught fire, tiny flames licking across its surface towards Mr Frog's cloak, which sprouted tiny flames of its own. At the same time, Talvi's shoes caught fire and began smoking.

But Mr Frog took no notice. Without warning, he pulled his sawpike back and stabbed the whirring blade towards Talvi's chest. I shrieked in horror as she stumbled backwards, clutching for something to hold onto, her axe hanging limply in her hand. Mr Frog continued, pressing the screeching weapon against her with as much force as he could muster, as the blade clattered and groaned in protest.

Suddenly Talvi regained her footing and knocked his weapon roughly to the side with the flat of her axe. A huge hole gleamed through her shirt, showing the jagged, twisted links of broken chain mail, which glittered in the light, as smoke from the fires began to cloud the ceiling.

As she readied her axe once more, she glared at him in the fury of a woman scorned, growling, "You drugged me, Mr Frog? I di'n't make you o'erseer for no good reason other'n that??"

"You did just as I wanted you to, Talvi," he said calmly, leaping towards her, as his flaming, jagged cloak billowed back. "And I drugged you many, many times."

She caught his strike, and with a kick sent him tumbling backwards towards the flames that were licking their way across the floor. As he attempted to get to his feet, she struck at him repeatedly with one hand, driving him back towards me as they slid across the shimmering ground.

The ceiling briefly erupted in a spray of water, dousing the flickering fires spread around the room. The shimmering, mirrored surface of the altered floor appeared to

melt away, revealing solid stone.

Talvi swung one last blow at Mr Frog, knocking him onto his back. She stood over him menacingly, and the fire faded from her eyes, replaced with a grim determination. "Mr Frog," she said in her country accent, her chest heaving with heavy breath, "You's jes' as bad as Joseph, mebbe worse. You ain't never gonna poison nobody again." She swung her axe blade downwards towards him.

At the last moment, he rolled aside and swung his sawpike shaft around her, catching her in the back with a loud crack.

Talvi screamed in pain and fell to her knees.

Mr Frog, tired and haggard, pulled himself to his feet beside her and said, "I'm sorry, Talvi."

I looked around desperately for some way to save my friend, and my eyes lighted on a tiny package inside a bag on a nearby table.

He couldn't see the wicked gleam in her eye that I could, as she suddenly swung her axe around, parallel to the floor. It caught him in the back of the knee, and he fell backwards, his weapon arm trapped beneath him. Talvi quickly moved on top of him, pinning his arms to the floor and holding the blade of her axe, hovering, over his throat.

I leapt for the bag on the table and snatched out the little object.

Talvi whispered, "Ah'm sorry, Mr Frog," just as I slammed the needle of a syringe into her arm.

She collapsed to the side. Turning her head and clutching her arm, she looked up at me with an innocent, bewildered look in her eyes that made my eyes swim with moisture. "V..." she said quietly, a tear trickling down her face, "you done betrayed me too, now... How could you? You, V... I took you in, kept you safe... we was friends."

I shook my head, as tears began to stain my cheeks. I hadn't wanted anyone to die. Not even Mr Frog.

Her gaze left mine, her eyes dizzying into a fog, and she slumped forwards atop Mr Frog. I backed away in disbelief at what I'd done, and grabbed my beanie from the floor where Mr Frog had thrown it.

Mr Frog started to try to move her body off him, and I didn't stay to watch. Jamming my little hat down on my head, over the ears I was so ashamed of, I ran to the door, throwing the lock and bolting outside.

I ran down the corridors of the apartment level and up the stairs, hoping to reach the farm level and get back through the little tunnel to the condemned dump. I had hopes that Mr Frog wouldn't have taken my belongings with him, and that I might be able to recover something... perhaps my old quilt, or my hairbrush.

As I exited the stairs onto the level of the mushroom farms, I heard someone nearby calling out. "You! It's you!" a male's voice yelled. I turned to look at the speaker. It was Mitchewawa, coming at me and pointing his finger accusingly.

I turned and ran. I didn't know how much longer I'd be able to keep this up before I collapsed from exhaustion, but I'd rather collapse anywhere besides ten feet from Mitch.

Dodging dwarves that were hauling things to and from the caravan, I headed towards the trade depot by the old wagon road. I thought that if I could make it that far, I might be able to find that little hidden tunnel that led into the dump.

As Splint passed by, I ducked into an alcove and tried unsuccessfully to breathe quietly. Fortunately, he was so absorbed in his duties that he didn't notice, but he

stopped only a few feet away to talk to one of the guards. He was talking about me. I waited - it seemed like forever before finally, finally, he moved on.

As soon as he left, I made a break for it, and was almost stunned to find Talvi ahead of me.

"Hey there, V," she said with a big smile and a nod. Her shirt had been changed. I'm not sure how the amnesiac had accomplished its job so quickly, but she seemed to have forgotten absolutely everything that had happened in the past few days. She just seemed... blissful. She was happier than I'd seen her in a long, long time, and I had to fight the urge to throw my arms around her, I was so glad she was all right. I only waved back, wiping away the tears of joy that threatened to fall.

With a wink, she turned back and continued towards the depot, and as I needed to go in the same direction, I followed her, into the huge underground courtyard that housed the trading depot.

A new small caravan, or something like it, was coming in from the entrance to the wagon road. I got up against the wall to wait for them to pass, but suddenly I heard screaming: "He's turning! He's turning!" someone yelled, causing everyone to panic. I had no idea what was going on, and slinked into a corner.

Then I saw him again: the big, strong dwarf with the lantern jaw. He was talking to Talvi and pointing down the hallway, deeper into the fortress. As she nodded and left at a brisk pace, he drew his sword, jogging towards the direction of the screaming. My heart fluttered. He was so close to me now.

Guards were evacuating everyone from the depot, but they didn't see me and I was left behind. I didn't understand what the fuss was about... the yelling had stopped, and the soldiers seemed less on edge. As far as I could tell, they'd already taken care of the problem.

Then I almost fainted. Right in front of me, less than fifteen feet away, a dwarf began to transform. He seemed to grow and split his armor, his skin shriveling and changing to a pallid, deathly hue as his muscles shrank away, his bony arms stretching to an unnatural length.

I shrieked in terror, and for a moment, Lantern-jaw looked straight at me. Then he saw the misshapen dwarf who was twisting and writhing like a worm, and after shouting a few orders, he charged.

But the transforming creature hadn't finished: it shuddered, and its front split in two halves, creating a deep gash from mouth to abdomen, ringed with hundreds upon hundreds of long, sharp teeth.

It was a Holistic Spawn. I'd just seen one transform right in front of me, and now I knew: the stories were real. I wasn't sure whether to vomit, scream, or cry... I just wanted more than anything to become really, really invisible.

Lantern-jaw reached the abomination and scored a clean strike straight through the head with his spear. I almost cheered, expecting the monster to fall to the ground, dead, but the spawn appeared unaffected, flinging Lantern-jaw against the wall beside me before extracting the spear and tossing it nonchalantly in my direction. I rushed over to where Lantern-jaw lay, and knelt, putting my hand on his chest to feel his heartbeat... before I remembered: he was wearing a breastplate. His eyes opened, and he shook his head as if to clear it.

"Are you hurt?" I asked him quietly, hardly aware of the battle raging behind me, as I heard another dwarf scream a battle cry and rush the monster.

He shook his head again in response, and looked back at his enemy, trying to struggle to his feet.

I turned around and saw another dwarf hit the monster in the chest, just before being ripped in two, blood spattering everywhere. I stared in shock, my mouth hanging open - I'd just witnessed death. Lantern-jaw seemed to be taking it even harder than I was... it must have been his friend.

Suddenly I screamed: the Spawn had turned, and was approaching us at an incredible pace, using its freakishly long arms to help it gallop forwards. The axe stuck in its chest seemed hardly an annoyance to the creature.

I glanced at Lantern-jaw. He was having trouble standing straight, as he staggered towards his weapon unsteadily.

The spawn was almost on us, but it wasn't headed for me... it was headed for the soldier.

It all happened so fast.

I screamed and sprinted at Lantern-jaw, throwing my full weight at him in a flying leap. We fell to the side as the Spawn's chest mouth gnashed against the wall, having missed us completely.

I looked at the soldier's face... he looked me in the eyes and nodded in appreciation.

<3 No one *ever* looks a skulker in the eyes. I almost melted, before I heard a scream behind me, and the monster fell dead, having shattered its own heart with the axe that it'd just crushed farther into its chest.

Other dwarves rushed towards us, checking on whether the Spawn was actually dead and picking up the fragments of armor that had been destroyed by the transformation. Lantern-jaw pulled himself to his feet, shaking his head slowly, and walked unsteadily towards the center of the room. I followed by him, lending what assistance I could and trying to help him stand straight, though I'm not even sure he even realized I was there.

Without warning, he turned towards the other side of the depot. A dwarf was standing there, in a dark, hooded robe that concealed his face in shadow. The dwarf motioned, and Lantern-jaw straightened, pulling his arm from my hand and following the mysterious hooded figure down a hallway.

I watched him go, standing unnoticed in the center of the depot courtyard, as other dwarves rushed around me. I'd hated that he'd left, but I was also so happy: happy for Talvi, happy I'd saved Lantern-jaw's life. I was so happy that I didn't hear the dwarf who was approaching from behind.

"Where did he go?" he asked brusquely, grabbing me by the arms and spinning me around to look in my face.

It was Mr Frog.

I stared at him, half in fear, half because I didn't know what he meant. "What?" I managed.

"Where did he go? Where did Urist go?" he asked urgently, shaking me slightly. I couldn't believe he wasn't killing me.

"I'm not sure what you mean..."

He looked so tired. Clearly, fighting women wasn't something he did every day.

"Urist, the new soldier from the caravan a few days ago, the one who attacked the Spawn a few minutes ago - where is he?"

My eyes widened as I realized who he meant. *Urist*, I thought, *what a beautiful name*.

Mr Frog shook me again. "Quickly!" he said.

My eyes refocused. "Sorry," I said, pointing down the hallway where I'd seen the lantern-jawed Urist disappear. "That way."



The former overseer let go of me and marched away in that direction at a brisk pace, saying over his shoulder, "Don't think I'm through with you yet. I'm simply short on time. I'll be back."

As he walked away, I noticed that he'd removed his destroyed cloak. Watching him disappear into the darkness, I suddenly realized why he wore it: without the cape on, he seemed taller, somehow... taller than a dwarf. It struck me that maybe... maybe he wasn't a dwarf at all.

Then I remembered Talvi's envelope. She'd told me to open it if anything happened to her.

Hastily I retrieved it from my blouse and slit the top, shaking the contents into my hand. Within it was an oddly designed key and a slip of parchment that read in Talvi's darkened scrawl, "Joseph must be stopped".



## HANSLANDA:

*Chapter Ten: Fungal Agents, from On Complex Anti-Hypnotics and Anti-Amnesiacs, by Grendal Vasiliy*

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*Reconnected, initiating transmission.*

*Downloading from Ballpoint Servers.*

*Please Wait.*

*Connecting.*

*Excerpt Accessed*

**Phase Three:** The most controversial and highly debated phase, phase three is considered by some to be simply high grade hallucinations. Others argue that the effects brought on by the third phase are in fact metaphysical representations of the souls of the dead and lost. In any case, the third phase's symptoms are high quality, incredibly realistic hallucinations of lost loved ones, living or dead. Typically these effects are sought out by individuals wishing to communicate with the dead. No true scientific evidence has been found suggesting the existence of souls or an afterlife, but subjects witnessing these hallucinations have without fail reported believing in souls and an afterlife after their experience, regardless of prior convictions.

Combined together, these effects, when properly dosed and timed by an individual, can be used to overcome the effects of hypnotics and amnesiacs. The 'souls' will force the subject to remember and to fight against the hypnosis. A high number of tests have resulted in a 100% success rate when properly timed.

Next, in Chapter Eleven, is Blood of Ulkair, a naturally occurring ooze found in several reportedly 'evil' iterations.

*End Transmission?*

*Transmission ended.*

*Saving excerpt.*

**(Hanslanda):** Now, we can move on to the final confrontation of Urist and the Mystery Dwarf.

### **Requiem**

Urist woke from his sleep well rested and at ease. He smiled at the roiling clouds of blood, surprising himself with his cheerfulness. It would surely be a good day today. He sat for a minute, trying to think of what to do next, who he could interview to get an even firmer grasp on the myriad complexities of this fortress, and finally he decided he would just wander the fortress again, and hopefully something would come to him after awhile.

He descended the stairs briskly, brushing past the few early risers and late shift workers on his way to the dining room. Urist entered the dining room, and spotted the dramatic dwarf, Draigneau was his name. Urist slid into a seat next to Draigneau, and snagged a mug filled with beer. Draigneau was bleary eyed and seemed quite groggy. Urist gulped down half the mug and smiled at Draigneau, "Late night?"

The dramatic dwarf nodded, "Yep, we finished digging out three tunnels that we'll be able to funnel the demons through to separate them and force them to fight us one on one. It took several of us militia dwarves to supervise and make sure the miners did it all right and proper, with fallback points and further channels. It was exhausting. Good news is we're about a quarter of the way there, within the next few years, we'll be fully prepared for them."

Urist nodded, "And then you'll what? Colonize hell?"

Draigneau smiled wearily, "Yeah, but we're going to burn that bridge when we reach it. Right now we're still in the initial planning stages for our invasion. Soon though."

Urist chuckled, and finished his beer, "Well, I wish you luck with that. Get some sleep, you look like draltha dung." With that, Urist stood and strode off into the fortress once more, his mind abuzz. He passed Splint in the hallway.

Splint was carrying a huge sheaf of papers, and he was grumbling tiredly. Urist watched Splint dump the papers on another dwarf's lap in the dining hall, and say, "There you go, Storm, that's all the previous Overseer reports, all the stocks information, and a rough outline of the work hours we'll need to set up to do what you want."

The other dwarf looked agape at the huge pile, then nodded a bit overwhelmedly, "Alright, good. We've already got three of the tunnels done, as well as the initial entry point prepared, so this will all come in handy."

Splint glared, "Wait, you all mined out more stone and didn't tell me how much?"

Damn it, I've been working on these reports for the last two days!"

The conversation devolved into an argument from there, so Urist left again, heading deeper, planning to check out the Demon Tunnels. On the living quarters level, he bumped into Talvino once more, and she smiled at him brightly, "Hello there fella, how you doin' today?"

Urist beamed at her, "I am well, milady, and how are you?"

"I'm doing fine, I got a pair of cavy from your caravan friends, and hopefully they'll have some lil babies soon. I sure miss havin' covies running around here." Her smiled shrunk a bit, "How did your business go?"

Urist shrugged, "My work is progressing, which is good enough. I have all the time in the world, and to be honest, I doubt the Baron expects my report immediately."

Talvino looked impressed, "A Baron? Which one?"

"Oh, Baron L-" Suddenly, another dwarf grabbed Urist by the elbow, and started pulling him away, frantic. Urist tried to pull out of his grip, but the dwarf kept jabbering and pulling.

"Come on, hurry up! We've got to get upstairs, a migrant wave came, and two of them are Spawn infected. We have to stop them before the others bring them inside!" The dwarf looked over his shoulder at Talvieno, "Get someone down to the Research Center, and have them open up two cells for these new arrivals, NOW!" Urist stopped resisting, and started running up the stairs. He'd seen what Spawn could do inside of a unprepared fortress. His battle in the abandoned dormitories of his old home came rushing back in an instant, and his arm started aching without warning.

They got above ground, into the trade depot courtyard, where about two dozen strange dwarves were milling in a group around two bleeding dwarves. Several dwarves in the crowd were shouting for the two wounded to be put down, but a protective circle of militia had already been formed by the caravan guards, and a couple doctors were trying to haul the dwarves across the courtyard. Urist sprinted to the wagons and grabbed his spear, but he was without his armor, and joined the circle of soldiers.

More militia arrived on scene, including bleary eyed Draigneau, a perky looking Fischer, and Steelcrazy. They pushed through the crowd, laying about with the shafts of their spears rather liberally, "Disperse! Disperse in the name of Spearbreakers! Get out of the way you idiots, what will you do if they turn here?" Fischer cried as they pushed into the center of the circle.

As that phrase percolated through the crowd, the migrants began to back off nervously, then they dispersed rather quickly. With the impediment gone, the doctors got help from two militia dwarves and lifted the wounded easily, then carried them inside, preceded by a wave of soldiers.

They soon reached the Research Center, where two cells were opened for the two dwarves, and several more doctors stood nervously shifting from foot to foot. Just as the crowd reached the cells, one wounded dwarf started screaming. He was immediately dropped, and a ring of blades surrounded him. His arms elongated suddenly, violently, with a hideous crackling sound. His screaming was replaced with gurgling as his skin started splitting and falling off, his bones fusing and pulsing as he changed. The soldiers began stabbing and slashing at him, and one got a good strike in, slicing off his head. A collective sigh of relief was interrupted by a screech. The other doctor was held by the other wounded once-dwarf, high in the air. The once-dwarf was snarling, and ripped the doctor in half, throwing the pieces into the crowd, bowling over several dwarves. While everyone was recovering, it charged, its claws already splitting the skin of its fingers. A great slash of one monstrous arm disemboweled a pair of caravan guards, their guts coiling out onto the floor with a flood of blood.

The beast grabbed another guard by the head, and squeezed, sending chunks of skull and brain spraying out as it crushed his head. It kicked, sending another militia dwarf spinning down the hallway. Several militia dwarves attacked back finally, cutting off one arm and impaling in several places. It shrugged off these wounds as its eyes turned black and dead like a shark's.

Then, as it pulled itself off their weapons, a snapping sound was heard. Its lower jaw split down the middle, the gap expanding down its chest, ripping open its ribcage to reveal fangs as long as a finger, a mouth big enough to fully enclose an adult dwarf. One of the remaining doctors was screaming, "Breach! Breach! We have a full breach! Fall back and seal the wing!" Another was catatonic in a corner, leaning against a cell door, crying.

Urist tackled the Spawn from behind, knocking it onto its face. He sat up on its heaving back, and plunged his spear right through its ghastly skull, pinning it to the ground. It bucked him off easily, and lifted itself, dragging its head up the spear all the way to the buttcap, then fully freeing itself from the offending weapon. Urist lay

stunned, mouth agape.

This Spawn was far, far stronger than it had any right to be. That blow would have killed any other Spawn Urist had fought. It turned, the garish wound dripping a thick, viscous black goo sluggishly. It scrambled toward him, its claws leaving gouges in the stone floor. Sarvesh leapt in front of it, and bashed it in the chest with his hammer, caving in its ribs on the left side. Little did he know that several of the ribs went through its heart, as it grabbed him as he tried to yank the hammer out, and ripped him in half, tossing the pieces to either side casually. It bore down on Urist again, and Urist drew his dagger, ready to die.

Just as the Spawn reached Urist, it fell dead, the rest of its life finally expended from its black heart.

Urist looked at the halves of his... His friend. Sarvesh had been his friend, even though Urist had tried to push him away. Urist shook off his grief for the moment, and struggled to his feet. All around him, gore was everywhere. Dwarves were dying on the floor, leaking their life's blood. A couple of the doctors were trying to set up a triage station, bandaging wounds and pushing guts back into body cavities. One thing caught Urist's attention though.

In the midst of the chaos, the mystery dwarf stood, a fell look on his face. He saw that Urist was looking at him, and he grinned darkly and said, "Urist, remember our conversation."

Urist felt strange, he felt drained. He stood mechanically, standing at straight attention, eyes unfocused. He tried to move, but could not.

"Urist, come with me." Urist fell into lockstep with the dwarf, following him. They went down, past squads of militia dwarves rushing to the Research Center, past groups of doctors and civilians scrambling to burn the Spawn corpses. They went down, and down and down. Past the magma forges, and into a grand hallway. It separated into three smaller hallways, leading deep into the earth.

At the terminus of these tunnels, a solid wall of gloriously beautiful stone stood. It was mostly a light blue, glittering and shimmering like it possessed an inner life of its own. Patches of it were dark, black like the pitch darkness of an unlit tunnel.

The mystery dwarf stood in front of the wall, murmuring to himself rapturously, "Yes, and now we will show them all? They will know the power of Armok!" Urist tried to move, to scream, to flinch, anything, but he was held as if by magic.

The dwarf turned on him, a crazed look in his eyes. "Urist, do you remember our conversation?" He gestured at the wall grandly, "Behind this stone are all the demons of hell. Billions upon billions of them. Clamoring for release, for the blood of the inhabitants of this iteration." He smiled at Urist, "You worship their god, you know. Your dwarven god is the devil. The master of evil, the GOD OF BLOOD. Well, I'm going to give you all what you wanted! What you deserve! I will unleash Armok on this world through you. You will birth a god unto this world, my friend."

He turned back to Urist, grinning. "Urist, pick up that pickaxe."

Urist reached down, and picked up the pickaxe. It was plain, made of bronze. A simple wooden shaft, with a utilitarian head atop it. To end the world with a pickaxe was tremendously Dwarven.

"Urist, do the right thing." Urist walked to the wall, each step forced from him. He stumbled fitfully, like he was having a controlled seizure. After what seemed like ages, he was standing before the warm wall, pickaxe at his side, trying to resist even now.

The dwarf roared, "URIST! I COMMAND YOU! DO THE RIGHT THING!"

Urist raised the pickaxe high above his head, his arms tensed against the swing, but he swung anyway. The pick dug into the adamantine wall deeply, and a whistle of warmed air came through the hole when Urist withdrew the tool for another swing. Horrifying screams and roars drifted through the hole, and a scratching noise could

be heard, as if a thousand hands were trying to dig it out. Urist raised the pick once more, his whole body tense.

"Urist, it is time." This voice was different. Urist fought the hypnosis enough to turn his head, to see Mr Frog standing at the entrance to one of the tunnels. "Urist, I'm begging you to stop." Even without the emotion that should accompany that statement, Mr Frog sounded earnest. "Urist, you must stop. For us. For your family. For your friends."

Mr Frog's features morphed, twisting into those of Sarvesh, "Urist, I saved you... I can't believe you lived! You must listen to Mr Frog. You must fight." Sarvesh had tears on his cheeks, "I've seen what will happen if you fail. Please..."

Now, Urist's old friend Melbil stood there, his fangs peeking out, "Urist, I'm so sorry. I'm so very sorry. I knew you would hate me for what I was, but you were my friend through it all. I loved you as a brother. Please don't do this. Don't do it, and if not for me, then for..."

"Me." Urist's wife stood there, with his son in her arms. She was smiling down at the boy gently, "Urist, I'm so sorry I left. I couldn't take it anymore. You'd become cold, and distant, I miss the old you. I miss you, Urist. I love you."

Now, beside his wife and son, his parents appeared, their eyes glistening with unfallen tears, "Son," His father said gruffly, "I know I wasn't always the most loving person. I know I didn't say a lot of things I should have said to you. Your mother and I, we just wanted you to know, we're so very proud of you, no matter what. No matter what, Urist, you are our greatest accomplishment, the crowning achievement of my life." His father smiled his smile, a quick baring of teeth, and a wrinkling of his eyes, "But there is one thing you must do. Stop that man. He is no dwarf, he is an evil, evil man from out of this world. Stop him, Urist, stop..."

Mr Frog lay on the ground, the specters fading around him, the evil man atop his chest, choking him forcefully while he laughed maniacally. Despite his imminent death, Mr Frog was speaking, hoarsely, "Stop... Him. Urist... Stop him. Urist..." Urist still stood poised to break open hell, the pick high above his head. He dropped the pick, and it clattered against the ground at his feet. A thousand voices shrieked in rage and hate as he quickly stepped up to the man, and pulled his head back by his hair. Urist drew his dagger for the second time that day, and placed its blade against the man's throat.

The man went wide eyed, and he yelped, "Urist! No! Do the right thing!"

"I am." Urist stated coldly, and drew his dagger across the bared throat. Blood sprayed across the wall, and the man fell to the ground, gurgling and flopping like a beached fish. Slowly, his struggles stopped, and Mr Frog sat up, coughing. His eyes were blood-filled, the vessels had popped while he was being choked. His throat was bruised and his face was nearly maroon from trapped blood.

Mr Frog summoned the strength to speak, "A fine... Job. Fine job." Then he passed out, his chest heaving forcefully as his body refilled its dangerously low oxygen levels.

Urist looked at the wall, and a figure stepped out.

Bedecked in brutally spiked armor of the same dark material that made up part of the wall, with beard that glittered the same color as the adamantite, the figure was a dwarf. A huge dwarf, nearly three times the size of Urist. He held a battle axe lightly in one hand, and his face blazed with unearthly energies.

Urist stood before Armok, God of Blood.

**Urist. My favored son.**

Urist fell down on his face in a deep bow, nearly prostrate before the god.

**I grant you a boon this day, for you have entertained me greatly with your struggles.** The figure help up the broken head of a spear, the same spear Urist had

broken fighting the spawn in his home. **Your broken spear. Fight well, Spearbreaker.**

## HANSLANDA:

Hans worked steadily, and carefully. He didn't want this whole contraption falling on him as he was building it. First he set the supports up, and then he dug out the level above in accordance with Splint's diagrams. When he finally was finished, nearly a whole day had passed and Hans was hungry. He hadn't seen anyone all day, but that didn't trouble him much. He'd never been much of a people person. Hans much preferred his own company and that of his beard to others.

He sat at the entrance to the dangerous hallway, eating a light lunch and drinking some fine beer, still somewhat puzzled over what the hallway was for. It didn't lead anywhere really, just reconnected with an old mining shaft with the main stairway on this level. As far as Hans could tell, no one ever came down here but to head toward the forges or the newly designed offensive corridors near the glorious adamantine veins. He shrugged and continued eating his meal when a sudden flurry of activity in the stairway caught his attention.

A strange cloaked dwarf came down the stairs swiftly. Following him was a strong looking, lantern jawed dwarf with a peculiar, blank expression and oddly stiff movements. They both walked in terse silence down the stairs past Hans. Next came Mr Frog, smelling of smoke and some other strange scents, his face set grimly in a haggard grimace as he nearly sprinted down the stairs.

Hans cocked his head, puzzling over this strange occurrence. What on earth was going on here? After several long minutes, Hans finally decided he should follow the oddly behaved dwarves and see what was up.

He followed the echo of their footsteps through the stairways and into the winding trap corridors. Halfway into the labyrinthine mass of corridors, he heard a faint pinging. Hans wasn't a skilled miner, but he recognized the sound of someone swinging a pick at stone and opening a hole between two chambers. His heart raced as he considered the possibilities of someone mining further into the adamantine vein, and he started running.

Ahead he heard shouting now, then silence, followed by speaking and a death rattle. Hans rounded the corner to see a brilliant blaze of light fading away, and three dwarves lying on the floor near the adamantine vein. A tiny hole was whistling merrily, letting warmed air into the fortress. Hans gasped and snatched up a large stone laying nearby. He rushed to the gap and plugged it up with the stone forcefully. Then he turned to the dwarves.

Mr Frog was apparently unconscious and gasping for air. His face was dark and ruddy, like he'd been deprived of air. The lantern jawed dwarf was laying on his back with a bloody dagger in one hand, and a broken spearpoint in the other, his eyes wide open and blankly staring at the ceiling. The strange dwarf was laying in a pool of blood next to Mr Frog, his throat laid open and little gouts of blood still spurting out. He was still, and obviously dead despite the small amounts of bleeding.

Hans knelt next to the prone soldier and slapped him across the face, "Oi! Hey!" He slapped him again, "What the bleeding hell happened in here?" Hans gave up after a few more slaps, and closed the stunned fellow's eyes roughly. He turned to Mr Frog, and shook the mechanic gently, "Mr Frog? Excuse me sir, but you need to wake up." Frog groaned softly.

Hans shook him a bit more roughly, and spoke in a commanding tone, "Oi, getcher ass up or I'm getting the boss."

Frog's eyes fluttered open and he grumbled, "I wasn't sleeping, I just was resting my eyes. Don't tell the supervisor." He seemed to get his bearings after a moment and said, "Er, I didn't say anything strange did I?"

"Just talked about a supervisor." Hans shrugged.

Mr Frog nodded, "Oh, right. We need a medical team down here. I doubt I'll stay conscious for very long, that dwarf did a number on me. And Urist seems to be stunned."

Hans didn't pick up on the peculiarities in Mr Frog's speech, instead nodding and running back toward the stairs for help.

---

Mr Frog knelt by the dead dwarf, and rapidly searched the corpse. His rather thorough search turned up little of interest, just a strange necklace with what appeared to be a holy symbol on it, and a PEA that when turned on only showed a blank screen. Frog cursed to himself quite profusely as he searched the PEA for a hidden button or perhaps some hint of a passcode, but before he got a good look at it, he heard pounding footsteps. Frog tucked the PEA and necklace into his coin pouch and took a quick swig of a small flask. Within seconds, he passed out.

---

In a temporally removed location, a dwarf smiled to himself in the shadows and keyed off his screen. Everything was going quite swimmingly so far.

## HANSLANDA:

Hans blithely carried the dead dwarf's corpse into the hospital where Mr Frog and Urist had been taken. He hadn't known what to do with it, and quite frankly had forgot he was carrying it until he entered the hospital. He suddenly realized he had the corpse, and frantically looked around for somewhere to put it before someone noticed. He had a flash of brilliance, and arranged the corpse on one of the medical tables. A doctor turned at the moment he finished, and saw the dead dwarf. "Hmm, another one today? That's another one for the clover."

Hans shrugged and wandered over to Mr Frog. Frog was sitting up in bed, quietly telling the doctor what to give him for the pain. The doctor nodded and strode toward the medicine cabinet as Hans reached the bed. Mr Frog gave Hans a wary look, "Yes?"

Hans shrugged, "I dunno. I got done with work just when this happened, so I've got a few hours to kill and I didn't know what else to do." He fiddled with one of the surgical instruments nervously, til he cut his finger. He stuck the bleeding finger in his mouth promptly.

Mr Frog's face briefly twisted into a grimace of disgust, then settled into a neutral expression. "Right. Why don't you go get Splint for me? I need to discuss some important matters with him."

A look of wonder spread across Hans' face as he considered the idea, and he took his finger out of his mouth to speak, "That's a great idea, sir! I was s'posed to talk to Splint any which ways when I finished that corridor. Deadly thing that is." Hans turned to leave, but Mr Frog grabbed him by the wrist. Hans turned, a slight frown on his face, "Sir, you're the boss and all, but don't you be touchin' me unannounced like that. I don't like it."



Mr Frog ignored him, "Corridor? Is it dangerous, like it could cave in at any time?" "Well, yes. He's havin' me link a few collapsible supports to a lever later. It all sounds incredibly dangerous. I'm sure a proper architect would have a terrible fit over the whole thing. One kick could bring the roof down." Hans was shaking his head ruefully.

Mr Frog nodded blankly, lost in thought and said, "Very good. Bring me the blueprints when you get done with Splint. Or actually, have *Splint* bring me the 'prints."

Hans nodded dutifully, "Right sir. Right away." Hans turned and left the hospital, thinking idly about his poor cut finger.

## HANSLANDA:

### Epilogue:

Urist woke up, feeling as he'd been having a terrible dream. He was in the hospital of Spearbreakers. It was nearly completely empty, except for a single dwarf struggling to get out of a traction bench. The dwarf saw Urist was awake, and gestured frantically at him. "Quick, help me out before those bastards come back!"

Urist stood in a daze, and stumbled over to the dwarf. He undid the straps and helped the fellow up. "Why are you in the bench? You seem fine?"

The dwarf grimaced, "I've been in it for months, maybe even years. Every time I leave, they track me down and put me back in it, telling me I need more time for my bones to heal. My bones are fine! They healed forever ago, I need to report for training. Why won't they just leave me alone?"

Urist tugged the other dwarf along, "Well, let's get you out of here then. We don't want you to stay stuck in there forever." They staggered out of the hospital, mutually supporting one another. They made it down the hallway and to the stairs when a doctor rounded the corner.

"Sus! What are you doing out of traction again? You know you aren't supposed to get out for another two weeks." The doctor smiled. He gently took Sus's other arm over his shoulders and turned the pair. "Urist, help me get him back to the hospital please, he's been a bit delusional lately."

Sus struggled violently, knocking the doctor back, "Get away NCommander! Just get away! I'll kill you! I'd rather die than go back in traction!"

The doctor's smile wavered, and he called out, "Orderlies! I need four orderlies please! It's Sus again."

Four dwarves came out of the room the doctor had just vacated. They eased Sus out of the confused Urist's grip, and ushered Sus back toward the hospital, as he kicked and screamed. Urist looked at the doctor, trying to understand, but he couldn't think.

The doctor smiled at Urist, and said, "So, you're finally awake huh? I imagine you'll want to go talk to Storm, the Overseer, or more likely Mr Frog. He told quite a story about you, how you single handedly stopped that maddwarf from trying to breach the Adamantine Wall. We're very appreciative; our defenses were far from ready. Try

going to the Mechanic's workshops, or the dining hall. Its around fourth shift break, so Frog might be there. Storm would be in his quarters, on the living quarters level. I've got to get back to tending Sus."

Urist nodded distractedly, trying to remember the events that had lead to him stopping the maddwarf. Everything was a blur after that last morning. He found Frog in the Mechanic's workshops, overseeing a novice making a mechanism. The youngster did something, and Frog sighed, exasperated, "No, Peg Z1 goes in the Gear 6, slot 7, not on the crankshaft. If you do it like that, then the whole thing operates backwards."

Urist cleared his throat, and Frog turned, his face basically blank, except his eyes were still somewhat discolored. Frog nodded, "Hello you. I thank you for saving me from the crazed miner. He'd about choked me out when you happened on us."

Urist crinkled his brow quizzically, "I thought he... I thought he made me go down there... I was under his control..."

Frog gave him a strange look, "Excuse me? You must be suffering from the stress. I'm told being that close to the Wall can have adverse mental affects. Something to do with the horrific screaming. I happened upon the miner trying to breach the wall, and you came along just as he had about finished me. You cut his throat, saving my life, and preventing him from releasing the Underdenizens."

Urist shook his head, "I... I guess that sounds right. But... I saw my family, and... And that young guard, Sarvesh. He died when those two migrants turned to Spawn in the Research Center."

Frog sighed, "Yes, its definitely stress than. Your young friend was ripped in half in front of you, and then you witnessed an attempted murder. Not to mention you had to slay a fellow dwarf in cold blood. You should talk to NCommander about that, you might need some extra-strength booze to offset the nightmares." Frog looked at the novice, "No, up one slot. Yes, there. Now open it, and reattach the bolts." He turned back to Urist, "Don't dwell on it, you'll just make the nightmares worse."

The very confused Urist nodded, trying to make sense of the senseless once again. He turned, beginning to head for the dining hall, when Frog spoke, "Oh, and Urist..." Urist turned, a hopeful look on his face.

"You had this." Frog handed Urist a broken spearpoint casually, "I don't know what you were doing with it, but it seemed important to you. Storm is in the Dining Hall, go see him."

Urist looked at the battered and worn spearpoint blankly. He took it and secured it on his belt. Urist wandered up to the Dining Hall, and entered the cavernous, mug filled space. He sat at a table with Storm. Storm had a huge sheaf of papers and journals and maps at the table, and he was frantically jotting down notes. He glanced up at Urist, "Oh, you. I wanted to thank you for saving us. Nothing fancy, but here is a commemorative mug for you." He slid a mug across the table to Urist. It was made of pitchblende, with no real decorations on it. "Thanks. Anyway, I've better get back to the paper work; I've got to find a way to catch this Necromancer so we can destroy the zombies outside our gates."

Urist filled the mug with some beer, and chugged it. He felt the clinging cobwebs of sobriety washed away by the blissful drink. He sighed contentedly, and poured another mugful of beer. After about three more, he sat bolt upright, his properly inebriated mind now working at full capacity. Urist yanked the spearpoint off his belt,

and scrutinized it closely.

On the blade was a tiny engraving in Dwarven Runic script. It was hard to make out, but Urist squinted and mouthed the words to himself quietly.

*You have amused me greatly. Fight well, Spearbreaker.*

## BUKITODINOS:

[[Talvieno's note: This post is about Scary Travel Dangers. Most migrants get at least one at some point.]]

Bukit readied his sword at the monsters. He didn't know much about fighting, but he made this sword when he was a dwarfling and knows every curve and every edge of this steel blade. He jumped on the monsters chest-tongue and pierced his heart. It let out a pained screech and fell to the ground, the next swiped at him, he jumped on the claw and cut the monster down the middle, it fell to the ground: dead. The last one had a pink tint; he guessed it was the leader. It chomped, he dodged, then... The trance set in, he became a fury of blade and beard that did not stop till that one fatal strike. It fell. The pink faded. He sheathed the blade and went on with the journey, the monsters were gone.

By Armok's infinite beard... His group of migrants will not become theses abominations anytime soon...

## BUKITODINOS:

Bukit doesn't have a journal\* so this is in third person for a reason.

(I'm moderately good at writing but after some time it becomes a chore so expect updates when I'm overseer to be short and scattered)

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Bukit could smell the Armok-blessed addy from here. Finally a chance to practice his craft in style. No more pig iron... just pure adamantine laughing in the face of demons. And a chance to make a new sword and be somewhat good at swordsmanship, he hoped, he and his small group of migrants kept walking, the miner was bounding, he also smells that blessed stone. Bukit hopes that those... things aren't in great number here, but after reading that mug poster he guesses so. But where else is there another haven? Spearbreakers is the one last great forts in history. All the others succumbed to the vampire wars, and those Armok forsaken things. And now it's raining blood, yay... just what he needed, he reminds himself to wash him and Chrysanthemum.\*\*

\* He'll get one in Spearbreakers

\*\* His sword's name

**Bukit's sword:**



## SPLINT:

*-The following is an old ropereed parchment document. It is torn around the edges, and one corner shows it was used as a coaster for a mug.*

To: Field Marshall Tholtig Lallokum

From: General Vutok Irolnil

Subject: Recon report by 88th Pike Company and enemy strength estimation.

Field Marshall Southspear, two of my better soldiers have arrived with their estimation on enemy strength and location. Based on their observation, my best analysts estimate the enemy has roughly 10,000 melee equipped troops and another 5,000 with various ranged weaponry. Also estimated that there will be around 2-3,000 fighting animals of both surface and cavern origins. They also say that to ensure victory the coalition will need to muster two to three times that plus fighting animals and another of their own number held in reserve. Recommend inducting the Kingdom of Symmetries and the goblins of the west islands into the coalition to shore up supply and numbers of available soldiers. If the goblins already in the Coalition have gone this far by our side, then the ones of the islands will see this war as beneficial to them as well. And if we send the greenskins first as always, fewer of our own will need to die. I must admit I find it odd that they're always willing to be the first in...

The enemy force appears to be preparing for battle near the savage mountains of the Flawless teeth and if The Master and Draigneans' observations can be trusted, it seems the local giant fowl don't take kindly to undead visitors. They suspect they are going to attempt a direct confrontation in three weeks at a location marked on the map as "The Smooth Points of Pride," another mountain range and sight of an old abandoned mountainhome.

The 88th is already moving at the time this message was sent to the Smooth Points to begin preparing the field to our advantage. We will arrive two and half weeks ahead of the vampires and have already given word to the 23rd Ranger Company to move in as well. We look forward to seeing you here Field Marshall, May the gods protect you.

General Irolnil

## BUKITODINOS:

After Bukit left Syrupleaf he wandered the lands. After that fortress was "preserved" by Armok. *So much pig iron*. As he kept walking he found all manner of mugs in the nearby lands, holy shit. It was like mugtopia. Big mugs, little mugs, mugs that menaced with spikes, mugs that were half full with ale, mugs that had ogres killing elves on them, and a great treasure: A discarded barrel of sunshine, it's been months sense he had sunshine. He and his migrants drank to their hearts' content. As they kept journeying they found a plain of blood... blood covered everything, it was hideous. He looked at the blood, not dwarven, not dwarven at all, slightly relieving but slightly disturbing too...

## MR FROG:

In a small, cramped bedroom in the dwarven fortress of Spearbreakers, a little man was sitting on his bed. He was too small to be a human; on the other hand, any dwarf would tell you that he was too tall and skinny to be a dwarf. The man had graying brown hair, a short, pointed beard, thick spectacles, and was dressed in what likely used to be a crisp white suit but was now mostly a filthy brown suit. His name -- or at least what he preferred to be referred to as -- was Mr Frog (no period, if you value your life at all).

In Mr Frog's hands was a black square object. He was staring at it, sucking on his lip, lost in thought. Every now and then, he would glance over at the room's stone door in the opposite wall nervously. He had, in fact, been doing so for several minutes prior to the intrusion of this narration. He was weighing the options. He had managed to worm himself into a very delicate situation, he knew exactly what he wanted out of it, and the slightest misstep could make the opportunity vanish like the memory of a pleasant dream (not that Mr Frog himself could actually remember what that was like; he hadn't had any pleasant dreams in a very long time).

Mr Frog finally seemed to come to a decision. He swung himself off the bed and walked the short distance to the door, making sure one last time that it had been sealed. Having done that, he returned to his bed and hunched over the black object protectively. He gently nudged a spot on its side and the front of the object suddenly shone in a glowing, intricately-detailed mosaic forming letters and coloured shapes.

Or, more concisely, he turned on a Portable Electronic Assistant and was now looking at the main interface.

Mr Frog poked at the screen a few times, and then hesitated, frowning. He glanced around the room absentmindedly. He took a small metal flask out of his pocket, took a sip of its contents, and closed his eyes, his expression softening as he felt the sweet poison rush through his veins. Then he prodded the device's screen once more.

A pale, blond-haired man appeared on the screen -- Joseph. He had electric blue eyes and a perfectly-square jaw, a perfectly-straight nose, and perfectly-smooth, unblemished skin. Even the little details like his ears looked like they had been sculpted by an artist -- or, more likely, a particularly-skilled surgeon. Mr Frog found the man's appearance to be highly-unsettling; a face that perfect could not possibly be natural. It couldn't possibly be cheap, either.

Joseph smiled with expert precision, his perfectly-white teeth gleaming. "Ah, Mr Frog," he said cordially; "I trust that you've seen the light?"

"Y-yes," stammered Mr Frog; he took another sip from his flask and continued, much more calmly: "Yes, I have." "I understand the meaning of what you said to me, just as you said I would," he added; "All I want is to carry your plan to completion." He figured that, when considering the kind of man he was dealing with, a bit of light ego-stroking couldn't possibly go amiss.

Joseph smiled with genuine joy -- or, at least, a close facsimile thereof; Mr Frog

wasn't sure. So much about this man seemed like a façade -- a carefully-constructed sham to lure prey in. Joseph clapped quietly. "I'm delighted to hear that you've seen the light, Mr Frog!" he said brightly; he turned to the left and fiddled with something offscreen. "Mr Frog's on board," he called out; "Send an extraction team to pick him up. I'm sending the coordinates over now."

Joseph turned his attention back to Mr Frog, still smiling. "I'm certain you'll find our facilities to be more than up to your standards, Mr Frog," he said; "You will not regret this. A team will come and pick you up shortly. We'll discuss things in more detail once you're secure." He looked down and moved his hand towards something immediately below the screen, and immediately afterwards was replaced by a pale blue background with "CALL TERMINATED" printed on it in white.

**(MR FROG):**

Madness, Mayhem, Mugs  
Spawn killing zombies for us  
Lots of dead covies

Madness, Mayhem, Mugs  
A dash of insane roleplay  
Add covies to taste

**(MITCHEWAWA):**

(Loose) limericks.

Mitch was a dwarf from Spearbreakers  
THAT SHIT WAS RUN BY INSANE FUCKERS  
The hospital water gave you the runs  
The Spawn were too much !!FUN!!  
And so the great lord Mitch  
Made Spearbreakers his utopian bitch

Great king Mitch,  
Made Spearbreakers quite rich  
Because he just didn't give a fuck,  
a fortress of marble from a pile of muck  
But the year came and went  
And he was told to get bent  
'You ungrateful bastards' he screamed  
So began anew the hospital's killing spree



## TALVIENO:

Let me tell you a tale  
Of a land drained of ale  
With mugs to the horizon  
A large sturdy fort  
Of the strangest sort  
That will keep on surprisin'

"Spearbreakers" it's called  
You'll find it's appalled  
E'en vets of battle gory  
"A prison" say some  
While drinking their rum  
And telling old ghost stories

"A minotaur's lair"  
They eerily croon  
"That stumped e'en the minotaur,  
And people thrown there  
Died not in its room  
But lost among the doors"

The children shudder  
When these tales are told  
And some might run and hide  
Those older wonder  
How one'd be so bold  
As to ever step inside

Apart from the rain  
(Of blood, say stories)  
And ghosts that linger on,  
There's always the bane  
Of dwarf and glory:  
The cruel Holistic Spawn

They ravaged the hills  
And blood they did spill  
Of the barbarians  
Ever wreaking doom,  
Sending dwarf to tomb  
And standing hair on end

"Abandon topside!"  
Overseers cried,  
But those tactics would fail  
As a thousand spikes  
And pits, if you like  
Could not the Spawn impale

The army of dwarves  
Refused to give way  
With pikes they stood their ground  
They braved the horrors  
And kept evil at bay  
While strewing teeth around

Their blood never spilled  
For that they more feared  
Than a stray asteroid  
They knew they'd be killed  
(Or lose more than their beard)  
If doctors they di'n't avoid

What became of that place  
So far underground  
That taunted even hell?  
By gods' saving grace  
It'll ne'er be found  
Or terrors seen so fell.

[[Talvieno's note: I tested out Mitch's save.]]

**(Talvieno):** Stormtemplar - if you haven't dealt with the zombies already, you need to. I've run through the first few month's after Mitch's reign a few times as tests, so... Just follow these and you'll be fine (or, really, they're just suggestions, but laying them out like this was more fun):

### **Dwarven Ten Commandments of Spearbreakers**

**I. THOU SHALT NOT LET THE UNDEAD HORDES INSIDE.** As tempting as it may be, especially since the first necromancer is pathetic and even simply letting his zombies run rampant through the fort will only net you around 6 losses total, this is a deathtrap. Mainly because in late spring you're going to get either A. three simultaneous sieges, B. three more necromancers who will path straight inside, taking advantage of the **bones and bodies everywhere**, or C. a very large number of goblin ambushes. You may also get any combination of the above three, and all of them are evil. Basically, try not to die. As hard as that is.

**II. THOU SHALT NOT FIGHT THEM ON THE SPIKE BRIDGE.** Dwarves are stupid and will

dodge a *lot* more often than zombies will (zombies don't dodge).

**III. THOU SHALT NOT TRY TO SAVE THE LAST MORONIC MIGRANT RUNNING BACK AND FORTH ABOVEGROUND.** You will lose more than you gain. In fact, if a single soldier gets stuck outside, even if he's legendary, **leave him**. He's not worth it. This happened to Feb, and I tried to save him.

**IV. THOU SHALT NOT LEAVE CORPSES LYING AROUND INSIDE.** Get them up. Fast. And then re-lock the doors to the "condemned" garbage dump.

**V. THOU SHALT NOT LEAVE THE ARMY IN SUCH A PATHETIC STATE.** Fix them, please... I beg you. They run straight to the entrance in order to pick up their gear, and then, "What ho! A zombie!" - the morons rush into battle completely unarmed and unarmored. Also the squads are very unbalanced for some reason...

**VI. THOU SHALT KEEP THE MILITARY STATIONED BY THE DEPOT.** At least, whenever you want to go outside. Necromancers are bad news, and sieges/ambushes can happen almost instantly. If a necromancer gets inside, a second one will, and then a third, and they're a heluva pain to track down. Especially while raising zombies.

**VII. THOU SHALT MAKE A BETTER ALERT ZONE.** The current one spans the entire fort. That's ridiculous. If someone gets inside, the fortress is screwed. Maybe a new burrow for just the dining area/food stockpile/hospital? They're all on the same level.

**VIII. THOU SHALT BETTER FORTIFY OUR ENTRANCE LATER.** We have one layer of defense. *One layer of defense*. I cannot stress enough how screwed we are because of this. We're fighting *freaking holistic spawn* and we have one layer of defense - a row of traps. Whoo, we're invincible, someone said. Well, what if dwarves are stupid? What if twenty dwarves want to walk all cutesy across our little bridge like it's a catwalk and they're fashion models, *right in the middle of a freaking spawn siege*, and the overseer doesn't want to kill the ten legendary workers? This just in: Dwarves are stupid, dwarves are severely misguided fashionistas, and dwarves love the spotlight. It makes little difference to them if said light is on the autopsy table. However, keyword "later". Doing it right away will undoubtedly kill the fortress. Wait for the shit at the end of late Spring to hit, then think about it.

**IX. THOU SHALT MAKE A MINECART TRACK.** (Ignore this if it's not actually updated to .08 or beyond.) Just make sure you set it to "guide" rather than "push" or "ride". There's a space for a spiral one to the left of the stairs at the very bottom, near the forges. Halfway up, you can dodge Simon Tam's room to the south and you can continue all the way up to the forges. But on this note...

**X. THOU SHALT DRAFT MORE MINERS.** Seriously. We only have two. One makes mugs and the other makes statues. What is wrong with this fortress?!?

And finally... Mitch - we're not out of necromancers like you said. Not even close. I didn't have room, but "**THOU SHALT FORBIT CRAP LIKE HELL'S AFTER YOU**" would be tenth commandment #11. As soon as you lower the bridge (lever to the right at the top of the dining room), the fashionistas will pour onto the catwalk.

**(Splint):** Mascot 1: Mr Frog, for the one off joke about cave moss being an effective drug turning him into an extradimensional drug-addict-researcher who pissed someone off at his company. Likely has an IC trait of "Doesn't really care about

anything anymore" or "Is a hardened individual."

Mascot 2: Talvi the possibly unstable woodcutter-mechanic with a strange cavy obsession.

Mascot 3: Bombzero the mad butcher, for her indiscriminate chopping up of anything. Quite honestly She probably would have chopped up a dead dwarf had she gotten the opportunity.

Mascot 4: Draigneau, our friendly expy of Zapp Brannigan, made so by the madness of this place. What's not awesome about that?

Mascot 5: The Master, who flipped shit over a blue garnet spear tip he broke while possessed by the voices that told him to keep chestnut the training pike safe.

Mascot 6: Splint the administrator, A person obsessed with defending the fortress to the point here he'll say, do, or have a hand in inventing damn near anything that will thin out the numbers of the spawn. Also likes to break mugs to relieve stress.

Mascot 7: Colonel Fischer, the head of the Spearbreakers military, who seems to have a blurred gender, with some thinking That the col. is male, and some female. Notoriously vicious with an irrational hate for flying birds and a mean streak several miles wide.

Mascot 8: A strange dwarf named Terrahex, who acts as the messenger of the fortress, delivering messages out fo the shadows where someone in the fort needs them. He's hard to spot, and because of that, we consider him worthy of being counted as a mascot.

Mascot 9: The F.R.O.G. observation system, made most often out a birds for the purpose of ambush detection. Ever exit to the surface has or needs one.

**(Mr Frog):** Every effort must be made to set up a Spawn moat.

**(Splint):** The problem being they'll scare the bejesus out of merchants, workers..... you know, things we have in short supply, as well as constantly pissing off the soldiers.

**(Mr Frog):** Measures can be taken to hide the moving parts of the Spawn-Powered Uninvitee Destroyer (S.P.U.D.) when not in use.

**(Splint):** clearly we can figure out a water cannon to force spawn into a prepared trench. However it'll have to be scouts or ambushes.

**(Talvieno):** I approve this. Every effort must be made to make a spawn moat with moving parts. 🤖

I would've named it "S.P.I.T" (Spawn-Powered Invader Terminator), though - "Uninvitee" doesn't sound right...

**(Hanslanda):** Yes, someone inform Stormtemplar that his next project is a Spawn Moat.

**(Mr Frog):** I suppose the problem with "uninvitee" is that it seems to imply that some sort of specific action was taken to prevent the person from being invited. Like, "Rakust's having a rave party in the statue garden, and under **no circumstances** must Tirist receive an invitation. No, I don't care if he comes anyways. Just make sure he's not invited. THIS IS IMPORTANT. LIVES HANG IN THE BALANCE."

Basically, an uninvitee implies the existence of an inviter, which is... odd.

**(Hanslanda):** Lol, I'm trying to imagine dwarves having a rave, and all I can picture is FrogDorf scratching records and dwarves snorting forgotten beast dust.

**(Mr Frog):** ...And now he's a DJ. My dwarf is truly multitalented.

**(Splint):** Clearly his vast technical knowledge (I dunno if I'm being humorous or not, since he hath bestowed upon the world the protochainsword) will yield the means to create such parties. Why? Simply because he was bored and wanted to find a more entertaining way to see if dwarves can have epilepsy besides shining a strobe light at them.

**(Hanslanda):** Now DorfDJFrog is scratching records, surveying the crowd, and recording how many dwarves are having seizures on his PEA. Then he takes a big swig of tetrodotoxin and starts scratching again.  
My god I must be tired to be picturing all this.

**(Talvieno):** Stormtemplar - looking forwards to the new update!!! And the arena... that'll be awesome. Did you read the Dwarven Ten Commandments? There were a lot of suggestions in that post...

**(Stormtemplar):** I did. One question. WHERE IS THE GARBAGE DUMP? IT BE IMPORTANT.

**(Talvieno):** All the way at the right on the same level as the trade depot. There's a tiny spot towards the middle-left that'll be perfect for a garbage chute - I'll take a pic and mark it off.

**(Stormtemplar):** Ummm, I tried every combination of lever pulls. The zombies aren't moving. WTF?

**(Mr Frog):** Levergatory: the eventual state of all succession forts.

**(Stormtemplar):** Okay, if no one has any suggestions I'm going to have to create a new entrance.

**(Splint):** it seems to be an unspoken tradition to make a new entrance or opening somewhere to the surface each year, so go for it. 2. I still say a trap-lined tunnel to the refuse pile Talvieno made would work to get any remaining necros. After x years, wall it off.

**(Stormtemplar):** Okay, it appears the entrance works JUST FINE. My dwarves decided to run outside when I opened the door, thankfully I think I reactivated the alert fast enough. Seems we have to go fight them and not the other way around.

**(Splint):** ..... Do we have one extremely disposable dwarf.

[[Talvieno's note: The fortress quickly fell. Not in an awesome, last stand way, either. Stormtemplar savescummed before we could stop him.]]

[[Talvieno's note: Paintbrushturkey (next overseer) made his next update following this. He later recompiled all of them into a single update, and that's what I'll be giving you - in pieces. Thanks for waiting. Due to continuity issues, you'll actually be reading the updates earlier than you would have otherwise. Fear not, later updates come with pictures.]]

## **PAINTBRUSHTURKEY:**

This is the diary of Paintbrushturkey; earlier pages are missing or are charred to the point of unreadability.

### **Granite:**

Mitch just came running at me giggling somewhat manically and handed me a key... and told me it was all in my hands now he then ran off giggling somewhat manically, not quite sure what he meant with that, but knowing this hellhole it can't be good

Wanted to go and see splint about some work orders but he was shouting something at someone in his office I only gathered 34.07 atom smashing and overseer, I wonder what atom smashing is but it sounds bad.... I think I will visit him once he has calmed down to try and find out what this is all about, I shall instead have a look at our military.

It appears that the military is in and even worse condition than I could have possibly imagined, I shall need to do something about this....

Finished drafting the initial drafting and "re-equipping" our glorious military all those shiny adamantine battle axes are now actually getting used, the roster is as follows, I did drag some unlucky sods from their workbenches and threw them at the respective commanders, Fisher muttered something about spawn fodder, I wonder what he means:

Fisher is leading the 10 pike dwarves

Pokonic was the first guy I found so he has command of the first squad of reservists, our 10 axe dwarves

And Feb has command of the remaining reserves, 10 hammerers that is....  
I have also designated a danger room to be dug out and some training spears to be carved

Lastly on my agenda there is the issue or refuse, it just seems to be piling up, so I have:

Designated a garbage dump – couldn't find one :-S  
Reworked refuse orders

I have also found that we have a whole pile of useless crap lying around in our armory, have told the guys down at the forges to melt it down...  
Just had a look out of the window it's crawling down there..... Blimey, our watch kiwi died, too courtesy of some undead risen in the watchtower...

I have ordered fisher and his squad to clear it, just had the report that some of the suckers just didn't want to stay dead and literally had to be turned into a sieve to stay dead, ah well dead is dead, none can withstand our glorious military, have ordered the bits to be cleaned up, also have told people to clean up the trade depot, what will others think of us. Fisher is staying in the tower for now just in case there any fakers.

Just checked on the progress of our training spears and they still have not been approved... SPLINT STOP MAKING FUCKING MUGS AND APPROVE THE BLOODY WORK ORDER... was it 3411 mugs he was shouting about? I hope not ..... hmm I think he heard me, just spied him sneaking back in his office.

### **Slate:**

A forgotten beast has come a skinless frog that secretes deadly dusk... thankfully it's locked down there in the caverns and can't do any harm...

## **MR FROG:**

### **Attack of the Perky Receptionist**

In a small, cramped bedroom in the dwarven fortress of Spearbreakers, a little man was sitting on his bed. He was far too small to be a human; on the other hand, any dwarf would tell you that he was too tall and skinny to be a dwarf. The man had graying brown hair, a short, pointed beard, thick spectacles, and was dressed in what likely used to be a crisp white suit but was now mostly a filthy brown suit. His name -- or at least what he preferred to be referred to as -- was Mr Frog (no period, if you value your life at all).

In Mr Frog's hands was a black square object. He was staring at it, sucking on his



lip, lost in thought. Every now and then, he would glance over at the room's stone door in the opposite wall nervously. He had, in fact, been doing so for several minutes prior to the intrusion of this narration. He was weighing his options; he had managed to worm himself into a very delicate situation, he knew exactly what he wanted out of it, and the slightest misstep could make the opportunity vanish like the memory of a pleasant dream (not that Mr Frog himself could actually remember what that was like; he hadn't had any pleasant dreams in a very long time).

Mr Frog finally seemed to come to a decision. He swung himself off the bed and walked the short distance to the door, making sure one last time that it had been sealed. Having done that, he returned to his bed and hunched over the black object protectively. He gently nudged a spot on its side and the front of the object suddenly shone in a glowing, intricately-detailed mosaic forming letters and coloured shapes.

Or, more concisely, he turned on a Portable Electronic Assistant and was now looking at the main interface.

Mr Frog poked at the screen a few times, then hesitated, frowning. He glanced around the room absentmindedly. He took a small metal flask out of his pocket, took a sip of its contents, and closed his eyes, his expression softening as he felt the sweet poison rush through his veins. Then he prodded the device's screen once more.

A pale, blond-haired man appeared on the screen -- Joseph. He had electric blue eyes and a perfectly-square jaw, a perfectly-straight nose, and perfectly-smooth, unblemished skin. Even the little details like his ears looked like they had been sculpted by an artist -- or, more likely, a particularly-skilled surgeon. Mr Frog found the man's appearance to be highly-unsettling; a face that perfect could not possibly be natural. It couldn't possibly be cheap, either.

Joseph smiled with expert precision, his perfectly-white teeth gleaming. "Ah, Mr Frog," he said cordially; "I trust that you've seen the light?"

"Y-yes," stammered Mr Frog; he took another sip from his flask and continued, much more calmly: "Yes, I have." "I understand the meaning of what you said to me, just as you said I would," he added; "All I want now is to carry your plan to completion." He figured that, when considering the kind of man he was dealing with, a bit of light ego-stroking couldn't possibly go amiss.

Joseph smiled with genuine joy -- or, at least, a close facsimile thereof; Mr Frog wasn't sure. So much about this man seemed like a façade -- a carefully-constructed sham to lure prey in. Joseph clapped quietly. "I'm delighted to hear that you've seen the light, Mr Frog!" he said brightly; he turned to the left and fiddled with something offscreen. "Mr Frog's on board," he called out; "Send an extraction team to pick him up. I'm sending the coordinates over now."

Joseph turned his attention back to Mr Frog, still smiling. "I'm certain you'll find our facilities to be more than up to your standards, Mr Frog," he said; "You will not regret this. A team will come and pick you up shortly; wait right where you are. We'll discuss things in more detail once you're secure." He looked down and moved his hand towards something below the screen, and immediately afterwards was replaced by a pale blue background with "CALL TERMINATED" printed on it in white.

Mr Frog sat there on his bed in silence for several minutes, his mind wandering. Everything appeared to be going smoothly so far. Joseph was by all appearances welcoming him in with open arms. Perfect. Perhaps this may even be easy.

Some more time passed. Nothing of note happened.

"Mr. Frog, is it? Joseph sent us," said a voice from behind Mr Frog. He flinched and spun around, his left eye twitching furiously. Behind him were three people -- one male, taller than Mr Frog, one a female about Mr Frog's size, and the third a diminutive blue-skinned humanoid that he couldn't identify.

"No period, dammit!" barked Mr Frog angrily; the little blue person squeaked and jumped back an inch or so. All three of the interlopers appeared to be carrying small sidearms, though Mr Frog knew better than to judge a weapon's potency by its size. Behind them was a hole in space. A building surrounded by well-mowed grass could be seen through it.

The man blinked confusedly for a moment, then understood. "My apologies," said the man evenly. "I would appreciate it if you would remain quiet, however," he continued pointedly. He motioned towards the wormhole; "Please come with us."

Mr Frog glared at the man once more, for good measure, then obediently got off of his bed -- slipping the PEA into his pocket -- and followed the three through the wormhole. He stepped very carefully across the boundary; he had seen what happened to careless people who accidentally placed a part of their body across the edge of the portal, and it wasn't pretty. Having one's foot sliced in half at the quantum level wasn't much fun.

"This is Eris, Mr. Frog," said the man (Mr Frog stared at the back of the man's head lividly); "Or, at least, part of it."

Mr Frog looked up at the building. It was surprisingly-pretty, for those who cared about that sort of thing. It was a pristine white, and the architecture was vaguely-reminiscent of a seashell. Beautifully-manicured green bushes dotted the perimeter. The sky was blue and dotted with small, puffy clouds. A clean, gently curving concrete path lead from where he was standing to what Mr Frog assumed was the front gate.

Mr Frog didn't like it. It was like Joseph in a way -- so precisely-picture-perfect that it raised the question of just why in the hell anyone would bother making the effort.

Mr Frog looked to the left; what he saw managed to unsettle him slightly. Off in the distance, he could see himself, the people in front of him, the path he was standing on, and a small machine immediately behind him. The scene repeated itself further off, and once more even further off, and so on ad infinitum, growing smaller and fainter with each iteration until Mr Frog could no longer make out anything. Mr Frog brought his attention back to the building. So it was a pocket universe. He glanced backwards at the machine behind him; it looked to be a wormhole tunnel. Probably just the working end of it; the power cell and other associated apparatus were likely buried under his feet.

"Coming, Mr. Frog?" said the man. Mr Frog gave him a death glare and followed along the path behind him and his cohorts. He looked up again at the sky as he walked; it appeared to be a giant screen. He wasn't sure how it was being held aloft; there didn't appear to be any supports.

The four went through the glass doors into what appeared to be a small lobby. Another person -- very clearly female, from the looks of it, but with purple-blue skin and what appeared to be tentacles in place of hair -- was standing in the middle, a

pleasant smile on her face. A small rug covered the white tiles. The walls were green and decorated with a couple generic paintings of landscapes (nobody knows who paints these, only that they are present in every waiting room and office known to society). A small white door was set into the opposite wall. Mr Frog noted that there was no reception desk -- anyone who made it to this room was by definition expected to be there. A white camera hung from the ceiling in a far corner.

The man motioned towards the strange woman. "Silena will take it from here," he said. The three walked across the room to the door and went through.

Silena approached Mr Frog, holding out a hand. "Welcome to Eris, Mr Frog," she said cheerily; "Joseph's told us about you. We're pleased to have you on board."

Mr Frog shook her hand and smiled back at her. Secretly, he sized her up, analyzing her for any sort of red flags. She seemed sincere; Mr Frog supposed that, in any other situation, he wouldn't doubt her intentions in the slightest. Something about this place, however, set him on edge. It was too nice for something so shady. They even had a perky receptionist.

"Let me give you the grand tour," said Silena playfully. She walked towards the door, motioning for Mr Frog to follow.

"I'd be honoured," said Mr Frog. She opened the door for him and he went through, Silena scurrying up in front of him.

[[Talvieno's note: still rearranging things here. Watch out for construction.]]

## TALVIENO:

### **The Continued Story of V**

*This is a stolen journal, originally belonging to a soldier named "HARD", who had a particularly strong stomach. The story of "V", also known as "Vanya", continues within its pages. It appears as though it may be far from over, though it is unclear just how much more she wrote. Only a few more entries grace these hard-bound sheets of rope reed parchment - if she wrote a full account of her adventures, the remainder must be contained elsewhere.*

"Victory" is an odd word... it implies that you've won; it implies that the enemy has been defeated. But what if you've lost while you've gained? What if both sides believe they have a victory? What if both get what they desire, and believe they've struck a crushing blow to the other? What word do you use then?

Some try to change it by calling it a "hollow victory" or a "little victory", but that's only tacking one word onto another. In the end, it doesn't matter what you call it. It's still not a complete win. Your opponent has defeated you in some ways, just as you've defeated your opponent in others.

Even if a great leader loses only a few dwarves while her enemy loses thousands of elves, like the Queen Tholtig fairy tale, those few dwarves who died have been defeated. The victory is near complete, but not total. And what if this great leader only had a few soldiers to begin with? What if she defeats thousands of elves and drives them back, but loses her entire civilization? The enemy was driven back, but could you really call it a victory?

You understand my problem... I don't know whether what I managed on that day was really a victory. I saved Talvi's life, and that of Mr Frog's, but was it really a victory? The true enemy, Joseph, was still at large, and had simply used me to further his cause. In the end, Joseph got what he wanted: Mr Frog's promise to assist him with a favor. The only way he failed was that I wasn't killed. But if he really knew everything... why wasn't I dead? If he could predict *my* actions - *as well* as those of Mr Frog's - with almost perfect precision, why hadn't I died? Was there something he didn't know? Was he maybe getting lazy?

I've had plenty of time to think and wonder these past weeks...

~~~

As I watched the tall, cloakless form of Mr Frog follow the path that Urist had taken deeper into the fortress, an idea suddenly struck me: my bracelet was unprotected. I could walk right into Mr Frog's room and find it, and it was unlikely that there were any traps remaining in there. A hope surged through my already-happy heart, and I turned, starting towards his room. I was excited, in a way: my bracelet would soon finally, finally be in my possession.

I knew I still had to be careful, though... the guards were on watch for me, and as I snuck through the many doors of the upper levels, I saw several soldiers snatching skulkers out of the shadows and asking them questions. Splint had given orders to look for me, just like he'd said he would a few hours before... the past few years, no one bothered to stop us except Mr Frog and Mitchewawa, but now every guard and every soldier was assisting. In a fortress where a third of the dwarves are in the military, that's saying something.

Through an accident, I'd suddenly made the basement class visible. I hoped they wouldn't hate me for it, and I *especially* hoped that the guards didn't know I was an elf. I knew in my heart that if they did, *one of them* at least would let it slip... and the entire fortress would know who I was.

These horrible, pointed ears drive me mad sometimes... they make me feel like I'm some kind of horrible mutant... like I stand out and everyone can tell who I am just by looking at me, beanie or not.

I may be an elf, but I was raised as a dwarf. While I don't hate my kind like King Cacame from the fairy tales did, I'm ashamed of who I am. I shouldn't be in a dwarf's fortress, but at the same time, it's my home.

Splint was right: my bracelet shouldn't exist. *I* shouldn't exist.

When I reached the apartment level, I walked straight down the corridors to Mr Frog's room, and it was just a few minutes move before I stood directly outside. As I turned the knob, I found to my dismay that it wouldn't move. He'd locked it when he'd left.

Of course the first thought in my mind was the little passage in the tail of Talvi's cavy room.

Standing before it once more, I looked inside. The grate still hadn't been placed back; it had only been an hour or less since I'd entered last, and Talvi had come after me.

As I steeled myself against my fears, preparing to enter, I couldn't help but smile as I found that this time, the fourth time through, I wasn't so scared. My heartbeat quickened still, but it didn't seem so horrible. With this helpful boost in my

confidence, I entered the little vent.

I plunged forwards through the thick darkness as the tunnel gained altitude, brushing my fingertips against the now-familiar walls, my arms outstretched, trying to stay cheerful and keep the half-hearted smile from leaving my face, even as I swallowed in fear and began to hyperventilate. I wanted to get out of there as fast as I could.

I can't see in the dark like a dwarf can, but my sense of touch is the same. Some people even say that elves have more sensitive skin... I'm not sure if it's true, but it was an added comfort to feel that the walls weren't actually going to crush in on me.

Abruptly I came to a halt, as my ears caught the sound of someone up ahead: a female voice, speaking quietly. I got to my knees to avoid the sloping ceiling and crept towards the tunnel exit, listening carefully.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I see no blood," the woman spoke. I continued forwards until I could just see inside Mr Frog's room.

Then I heard a voice I recognized all too well, overdone with pleasantries.

"Disappointing, disappointing. Are there any signs of the girl's death, or anything unusual?" It was unmistakably that of Joseph, but the hateful tone he'd used with me was gone. I crawled ahead to the end of the tunnel and peered inside.

A strange figure was pacing about the room, apparently human, but her apparel seemed otherworldly. The sloping chest vouched for it being a woman. She seemed to be searching the floor for something, while speaking to someone I couldn't see.

"There are two discarded daggers here, sir. While metal, they aren't of dwarven make - I've never seen anything like it before. Their blades are badly damaged."

"Show me."

The woman walked briskly across the room to one of the corners, and I could see her lift one of Talvi's daggers. Just for a brief, brief moment, I caught sight of a magical tablet similar to the one Mr Frog had. She was holding it and using it the same way.

"Here you are, sir," she said. I got the impression that she might be a soldier of some sort: everything she did had a very professional feel to it.

"Very interesting, very interesting indeed..." I heard Joseph muse. "It is weaponry of the Vampiric wars, likely belonging to Talvi Diamondknight, who served with Splint Spearspin, just before the last of the vampires were wiped from existence. The damage pattern appears consistent with that of one of Mr Frog's chainswords, likely the one you found destroyed - perhaps he desired to test his weapon before he got rid of her. Are there any other abnormalities in the room? Make sure you've made a thorough sweep."

She placed it back on the floor where she'd found it and began to slowly sweep her eyes across the floor, approaching my little corner beside Mr Frog's bed. I backed a little further down the shaft.

That was when I realized that she'd somehow gotten inside while the door was locked. After a little thought, I decided that Mr Frog's cavy tunnel must've been better known than I believed: Joseph clearly knew of it, and it seemed the woman working for him had known of it as well.

Finally she stopped, less than ten feet away from me, and bent down, picking something up off the floor. As she bent downwards, her straight, dark hair fell forwards, and her ears poked through behind it. I started as I realized that she was an elf, just like me. She had pointed ears just as I did, and yet she didn't appear to be ashamed of them, as she went without a hat.

She held up what she'd retrieved in front of the tablet. "Two syringe darts, sir, empty of fluid."

"I see, I see!" Joseph sounded joyful, and as if he'd just solved a great puzzle. "Mr Frog decided to poison her rather than spill her blood, excellent! He's a clever man, as I've often said. Everything is going as I planned it, and rightly so! You have done well, Vanya Carena. You may return to Ballpoint Technologies until I have further need of you."

"Yes sir," she said, and her face dimmed as the tablet's front ceased to throw light onto it.

I hardly noticed her response, so struck was I by the fact that standing a stone's throw in front of me was the *real* spy... the person Mr Frog had thought I was... the person who shared my first name. Joseph had pronounced it correctly, too, rhyming the first syllable with "pawn", a word that is too often in my mind now.

Walking to the shimmering hoops on the darker side of the room, the elven spy began to work with some of the machinery. Suddenly there was a flash of light and a buzz like bees, and the hoop widened to a tall oval, the air inside it rippling and shimmering like water. I gasped aloud at the sight before I could stop myself.

Fortunately, Carena didn't seem to notice, and stepped right into the magical device as if it was something she did every day. She disappeared completely; there was nothing left of her. I've never, ever seen anything like it, before or since.

With another buzz and a whoosh, the rippling air seemed to burn away like flames, and in an instant, it was back to normal.

I couldn't help but wonder, though... why would Joseph send Carena? Why an elf? Why someone who shared my first name, and apparently my initials as well?

I laid inside the tunnel, my thoughts racing as I attempted unsuccessfully to will myself to move. The words in Talvi's envelope echoed through my mind: "*Joseph must be stopped.*"

I moved forwards into Mr Frog's room and got to my feet. Taking the envelope back out of my blouse, I shook the contents into my hand.

The key was strange: the bits were hollow, and were filled with black and golden metal. What had my attention at the time, however, was the little slip of parchment. I read it again: "Joseph must be stopped."

On a whim, I flipped it over, and was surprised at what I saw: I'd missed the writing on the other side, which was in a smaller, lighter style of handwriting. It was still in Talvi's crude scrawl, and read, "He said he'll destroy Spearbreakers. Warn Splint. It's dangerous to go alone. Take this, and". The message ended abruptly, leaving me wondering what she'd forgotten to write.

It was ridiculous. Why would Talvi send me, a basement-class dwarf, to Splint? Talvi knew Splint wasn't fond of skulkers, even *without* knowing he'd mandated my arrest. She was basically sending me into the honey badger's den, alone.

I looked at the key again. She'd said it was dangerous to go alone, but what did the key fit? Was it supposed to release from bondage some sort of magical creature meant to protect me?

I slipped the key and parchment clipping back into my envelope, wondering how much time I would have to search for my bracelet before Mr Frog returned. I was sure that if he found me in his office again, it wouldn't matter that I saved his life or helped him with Talvi. I was sure he'd try to kill me again.

With this in mind, I only spent a few minutes searching for my bracelet before quitting. If my little keepsake had been in there at all, he'd hidden it very cleverly.

I could've gone back through the cavy tunnel, but I really, really didn't want to have to travel through that tiny passage again if I could help it. I decided to brave the hallways instead, unlocking the door and leaving Mr Frog's room.

Locking the door behind me, I hurried down the wide corridors to Talvi's room, as I believed it to be the most likely location for a lock her key would fit. It was her key, after all.

I had to dodge into a bedroom at one point to avoid the guards patrolling the halls, something I'd never had to do before. Thankfully, the bedroom was vacant, and it wasn't long before I hurried on my way. Not long after that I reached my destination.

Removing the key again, I began walking around Talvi's room, trying to find a chest or cabinet it would fit. Ironically, most of them were already unlocked; security was a matter Talvi never considered.

I finally gave up and left, but to my delight met a familiar face in the hallway outside the door.

"Talvi!" I whispered happily, giving her a hug.

"Aw, my V girl!" she exclaimed a bit too loudly, giving a hug that nearly crushed the life out of me. "What's the hug for?"

I shook my head. "I'm just happy," I said, hastily retrieving the key from the envelope again. "Talvi, have you seen this key before?" I asked, holding it up in the light.

The former overseer looked it over carefully, moving her head to look at one side, and then the other. Leaning in closely, she sniffed it, before straightening with a shrug. "Sorry, V, I ain't ne'er seen it afore. You lookin' for a lock it fits?"

I nodded, putting it back in my blouse. "Yes, Miss Talvi. I just thought you might know," I said unhappily. She noticed my disappointment and appeared chagrined.

"It's okay, though," I added quickly. "Thank you anyway, you're a great help to me." This appeared to cheer her somewhat. "Aw, thass no problem," she said with a wide smile, giving me another, smaller hug. "I'll let y'know iffn I sniff out a lock that smells like it, though, 'K?"

I knew her well enough to know that "sniff out" wasn't likely a figure of speech. "All right. And thank you again!" I said quietly, and then we parted ways.

It's remarkable what a little bit of hope can do for a girl: though I was homeless, and all I had in my possession was a stolen journal, a mysterious key, and a hat from a garbage heap, somehow I thought that maybe bringing Talvi's warning to Splint as she requested would redeem myself in his eyes. I didn't care for being a hero or saving the fortress. I just wanted back to my old, quiet life... the way things used to be. I never wanted wealth; I never wanted power. I especially never wanted fame... I'd be more likely to receive infamy, anyway, just because of my elven heritage. I just wanted to live in peace. I wasn't cut out for any of what was going on, and I knew it, too.

I hesitated outside Splint's office door for a moment, pressing my ear to it. I could hear quiet voices, but I wasn't sure whom they belonged to. Finally I got up enough courage to draw up a plan in my head: I would show him the slip of paper, and then, when I had his attention, I'd show him the key. If there was anyone who might know what it unlocked, it would be him. After getting Talvi's parchment message out, I knocked on the door.

The slat drew back, revealing the eyes and raised eyebrows of a dwarf. The door

opened quickly, and a hand pulled me inside.

I looked up at my captor: it was Draigneane, another former overseer of the fortress. He always wore what he called a "man skirt", as well as a very flashy dress shirt, and his hair was always, always very neatly combed. He was unmistakable.

His musical voice was just as recognizable. "Could this be that same dangerous, skulking spy, Splint?" he asked, dragging me behind him towards the conference table where Splint and Colonel Fischer were getting to their feet in surprise. "It would appear my sheer magnetism has drawn her out of the woodworks, and as you can see she's clearly no match for my strength." The weird thing was, he wasn't being sarcastic. He really does have that big of an ego.

Splint's brow furrowed. "Enough, Draigneane. Remove that hat she's wearing - let's see if it's really her."

Draigneane removed it with a flourish and a bow, as if he was finishing some great act onstage. I could feel the blood that crept into my cheeks as Fischer spoke: "Pointed ears. It's her."

Splint only shook his head. "You're definitely the dumbest spy I've ever seen, but at least you've saved us the trouble of tracking you down." Turning, he spoke to Fischer. "Cuff her - let's get her down to the prison."

"Wait!" I yelled, and three sets of eyes came to rest on me. "I brought you something you have to see. Someone's trying to destroy the fortress, and I'm trying to help you!" I straightened out the piece of paper as best as I could and held it up. Draigneane snatched it from my fingers. "It appears to be an ancient dialect of Koboldese. Fortunately, I can read in no less than sixteen languages."

Splint raised an eyebrow. Beside him, Fischer rolled her eyes.

"Junn sepp mussabbi stuppid..." Draigneane mused in a serious, thoughtful tone.

"Would you like me to translate?"

"No." Fischer answered flatly, walking forwards at a rough pace and snatching it from him. "Please, please don't." She took it to Splint, who examined it carefully. I watched, actually hopeful that I might be allowed a room of my own when it was all over.

Splint scratched his beard. "Koboldese? This is nothing more than Dwarven Standard. Corai's taught me how kobolds communicate, anyway - they don't use writing. This handwriting's horrible, though..." He flipped it over, reading the other side. "You," he addressed me, "who wrote this?"

"It was Miss Talvi, Mr. Splint," I said as calmly as I could.

It was a mistake to say. His expression changed from a thoughtful curiousness to disdain. "You clearly couldn't have been here long - Talvi isn't right in the head, and we don't take anything she says at face value. Let's just finish this business - Fischer, hurry up and take her to the prison."

Fischer pulled out a set of manacles and approached me. "Splint, I've had to tell you many, many times. This fortress has been running for six years, and we *still* don't have a prison. Not even a room with chains attached to the floors and walls."

I shook my head and tried to get away, but even one-handed, Draigneane was too strong for me. "I will receive public credit for her capture, I assume?" he asked, examining the fingernails of his free hand with a pleased look on his face.

"Of course not," Splint said as I switched captors.

I felt the cold steel of the handcuffs biting into my wrists... dwarven handcuffs aren't something to mess around with, and Fischer puts them on tightly.

"This has to be kept secret," Splint continued. "I don't want it getting out that we have an elvish spy in custody. And Fischer..." He paused for a moment, deep in thought.

"Sir?" she asked, standing at the ready.

"If we really don't have a jail, just throw her in a room near the spawn."

I bit my lip, but made a final, desperate effort. "Wait!" I cried out. "I have something else to show you!"

A hand clamped over my mouth with vicious strength. "Yes sir, Splint," Fischer said. "I'm going to take the liberty to knock her unconscious as well."

"Fine, fine," Splint said unconcernedly, already turning back to his work. "And keep those ears of hers covered - I don't want this getting out. We can deal with her later."

I felt my beanie being jammed over my ears, and that was all I knew before Fischer's gauntleted fist came down roughly on my head.

And... here I've been for the past... I don't know how long, honestly. A few months at least, I'm sure. I can hear dwarves talking down the hall on occasion, when the Spawn caged near me aren't screeching hideously and clawing at their doors. If I heard correctly, Mitchewawa isn't the overseer anymore. It's someone new: PaintbrushTurkey. He seems pretty bright, at least - I heard someone saying migrants actually made it to the fortress for once, despite the hundreds of zombies milling outside our gates. That hasn't happened in years. It also sounds like he did an incredible job of upgrading the military, something you'd expect from an army dwarf.

The Spawn Isolation Chambers, where I am, have been designated as an area with restricted access. Splint didn't want anyone in here who wasn't cleared. He interrogated me once, early on, but he didn't stay long. "I'll come back when you feel more willing to talk," he told me, wincing at the noise the Spawn were making as he left. His room is up on the top floor, far away from the noise they make; unlike the rest of the dwarves, he doesn't have to sleep through their racket, and he's not used to it. To his credit, though, he did bring me a charcoal pencil... Splint's a kind dwarf at heart. I'm not completely sure, but I don't think he sees me as a spy anymore.

The only person I see regularly is Fischer... I suppose to make sure I haven't escaped or been let free. I don't see how there's much chance of that, seeing how the Holistic Spawn themselves can't break free of these cells. Even so, she refuses to speak to me, and ignores anything I say. On rare occasions, other dwarves come down here to check on the Spawn. Sometimes they look at me, but it's not often any more than a glance.

I used to cry sometimes, after Fischer threw me in here, but that happens less now... I don't see that I'm getting out of here anytime soon. I'll probably be here until the fortress falls.

It's unfair, though... You try to save the fortress, and you wind up incarcerated. You save the lives of two people, and you wind up forgotten... sitting lifeless in a darkened corner like a doll forgotten by its owner... gathering dust, and hoping against hope that the end is coming soon.

☆

(Megaman3321): WHY ARE ALL YOU GUYS SUCH GOOD WRITERS? You could turn Spearbreakers into a good movie with the amount of information you guys have been throwing off.

(Hanslanda): *Begins writing up screenplay*

(Aseaheru): SCREENPLAY PLEASE!

(Talvieno): Spearbreakers practically *begs* to have stories written about it. Think about it - you've got tons of "bad guys" who aren't really bad guys at all, but are simply on their own side - Parasol, Joseph, Ballpoint, the necromancers, and if you want you can simply write from a different viewpoint and make the good guys into bad guys. You've got a huge history, you've got constant battles just to protect caravans passing through, you've got a sci-fi war going on at the same time, you have no shortage of "good guys", and even the middling characters have enough meat on them to pass as protagonists if you wanted. You've got plenty of space for romance (generally of the epic failing variety, leading to awesome drama), and more than enough room for betrayal - everyone in Spearbreakers is basically on their own side, as it's so hard to survive that if you focus on anyone else you wind up zombie food (figuratively speaking). And when someone nears becoming zombie food, it's a perfect opportunity for a hero to emerge and save the day (or a villain to emerge and ensure their downfall). It's a writer's paradise.

Spearbreakers has good writers possibly because it attracts them. A story about a happy aboveground fort with unicorns and rainbows and no problems to speak of begs for nothing to be written about it... and Spearbreakers is the absolute opposite. Nobody in the fortress is happy. ...except perhaps Draigneau. Actually, Story!Spearbreakers is probably really close to a civil war.

MR FROG

Perky Receptionist: The Awakening

They entered into a long hallway with double doors on the far side. Another door was set into the right wall near the end and a staircase was in the wall to the left, a bit closer to Mr Frog's position. Mr Frog noted that the large expanse of hallway in between the staircase and the door behind him -- almost three quarters of the hall's length -- was completely-empty, with no doors or any ornamentation. Odd. Another camera hung from the ceiling on the far side.

Silena lead Mr Frog down the hallway and opened the double doors, ushering him in. They were now in an expansive room; it appeared to be an auditorium of some stripe. Many curved rows of chairs went down a slope, all facing a massive screen taking up most of the opposite wall. The walls were a matte black. Mr Frog looked at the screen; he had a hunch what it was for.

"This is the audience chamber," said Silena brightly, "where we receive commands from our leader." She looked at Mr Frog. "You've met Joseph, yes?" she asked, her eyes sparkling as she mentioned his name.

Mr Frog nodded, still staring at the enormous screen. Joseph clearly enjoyed being the center of attention.

Silena gestured towards the door and moved to exit the room; Mr Frog followed after her. She lead him to the near door in the hallway; she pressed a button on a panel next to it, and the door slid open. They entered into what appeared to be an elevator.

"Before we go any further, there's something Joseph requested that we do," stated Silena placidly; "No worries, it'll just take a moment." She pushed some buttons, and the elevator began to move. Mr Frog raised an eyebrow, curious. He couldn't get a read on the woman's intentions. It didn't seem intentional; she was simply so uniformly cheerful that it was impossible to discern what she was thinking.

"So, tell me a little about yourself, Mr Frog," said Silena conversationally; "You're part of the team now, so I want to know more about you." She looked down at Mr Frog and smiled invitingly.

"I'm a bioengineer," stated Mr Frog.

Silena tilted her head, her smile still firmly in place. "Oh, come now," she said cajolingly; "There has to be more than that. Why did you decide to join up?"

Mr Frog felt a spark of annoyance. The woman's cheeriness was wearing thin. "I had my reasons," he said, with a note of finality. Telling her exactly why he was here seemed like a terrible idea to Mr Frog.

"Aww, why so secretive?" said Silena playfully; "We're all equal here. You can tell us all the gory details."

The door slid open. It had only been a few seconds in the elevator, but it had felt like a lifetime. Mr Frog had never met a woman so attractive that he was so desperate to get away from. Her inexhaustibly-upbeat disposition was suffocating.

In front of them was a small room exiting into another long hallway. The walls were a sunny yellow, and a small potted plant was in the far left corner. On the right side of the room was an odd machine.

A few seconds passed; Mr Frog stole a glance back at Silena, who was still looking at him expectantly. Mr Frog pointedly gestured towards the room ahead; Silena thought for a moment, then appeared to remember what she was supposed to do and lead Mr Frog into the room, looking mildly embarrassed. "This is Quantum and Nuclear Physics Research and Development Sector A," she recited; "Bioengineering is a few floors up."

Silena gestured towards the machine. It appeared to consist of two pods with a clear hatch, each big enough to hold a person. The hatch on the left pod was open. "Get inside," she said placidly.

Mr Frog looked at the machine with guarded interest. "What is it?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, but Joseph told me not to tell you," said Silena apologetically; "No worries, though. It won't hurt you or anything. It'll just take a few seconds."

Mr Frog considered this. He supposed that, had Joseph wanted him dead, he likely wouldn't even have gotten this far. "If you say so," he muttered; he walked forward and lowered himself backwards into the pod. Silena closed the lid over him and pushed some buttons on the side. It's okay, he told himself; You're Joseph's ace in the hole. He wouldn't do anything to compromise your safety.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash of light, and Mr Frog was blinded. He pounded the lid frantically, but it wouldn't budge. "You're going to be fine," he heard Silena

say hurriedly; "It's almost done. Just relax." Mr Frog responded with a loud stream of cursing, which was shortly drowned out by a high-pitched keening noise from the other pod.

After a few moments, the other pod went quiet, and Mr Frog heard the hatch in front of him swing open. A loud pounding started up from the other pod, along with a disturbingly-familiar string of profanities. A few moments later, Mr Frog's sight began to return; he struggled out of the pod, unsure as to just what exactly had happened but absolutely furious about it nonetheless. Mr Frog glanced around, looking for Silena; she was over on the right side of the machine. What he saw in the other pod, however, cleanly derailed his train of thought. He wheeled around away from it, feeling nauseous.

In the pod was another Mr Frog, fully-clothed (even the mud stains on his suit had been perfectly-replicated) and absolutely-furious. Of all the horrible things Mr Frog had seen, none came remotely-close to seeing himself.

The shouting and pounding stopped; Mr Frog felt Silena's hand on his shoulder, and he wheeled around, glaring lividly at her. She backed away hurriedly, raising her hands in front of herself. Mr Frog stepped towards her threateningly.

"I-I'm sorry," she stammered; "But if I'd told you what it did, there's no way you would have gotten in." Mr Frog took a clumsy swing at her, which she effortlessly dodged. "Please try to understand," she said placatingly; "If Ballpoint realizes that you're gone, they'll know right away that we did it. Once they know we're involved, they have the technology to track us to here and... end us. Fortunately," -- she gestured towards the other Mr Frog, now apparently-unconscious -- "'You'll' be back before anybody even realizes that you're gone. With some key memories altered, of course."

This, while true, did absolutely nothing to sate the rage of Mr Frog, who was very much not in the mood to puzzle out the ethics of producing a quantum-accurate replica of himself. One of him was bad enough. He took a deep breath and forced himself to, if not calm down, then at the very least stop trying to murder Silena. He shot her a simmering glare.

Silena bit her lip. "I really am so, so sorry," she said; to her credit, she at least looked suitably-guilty. The guilt vanished just as quickly as it appeared, replaced by her usual chipper smile. "I'll lead you up to your room, okay?" she said calmly; "We'll continue tomorrow. Just try to get some rest, okay? You're probably pretty shaken." Mr Frog continued to glower at her, irritated by how she spoke to him, as though he was an angry child; she flinched slightly and walked towards the elevator, motioning for him to follow. They rode the elevator upwards in silence.

They were back in the entrance hall; Silena lead Mr Frog up the staircase, going up two floors before exiting into a gently-curving circular hallway with doors on the inner and outer curves. The lighting was softer here; the floor was carpet, and the walls were a muted beige. Mr Frog counted the doors as they went around; they had passed by ten doors on the outside going clockwise before stopping at a door on the outer curve. Silena opened the door and ushered Mr Frog inside. They entered into a large room. The walls were sky-blue and the floor was a cream-coloured shag. A window opened to the outside on the far wall; the other side of the building was visible a short distance away. The near left corner was taken up by a small kitchen. In the center of the room were two leather sofas facing a table with a pair of

notebook computers resting on it. Two doors were in the left wall and one was in the right.

It was a nice enough room, Mr Frog supposed. Interesting scenery, if nothing else.

"Bathroom and laundry's through the door to the right -- something I'm sure you'll be glad to hear," said Silena brightly, looking at Mr Frog's filthy suit; "We have a shipment of new clothes coming in for you shortly, though looking at you I'm almost sure Joseph got the size wrong." "Your bedroom's the far door to the left," she added; "Mine's the other door, if you need me for anything."

Mr Frog's heart dropped into his stomach. He'd rather room with an HS-X than this vapid, inscrutable woman. On top of that, he wasn't sure what species she was, so he couldn't even use her as a makeshift test subject.

"I work in bioengineering too, so I'm sure we'll get along just great," continued Silena happily; "Though I guess you're still angry about the replica right now." She turned and walked out of the room. "Looking forward to working with you," she bubbled as she closed the door.

Mr Frog staggered across the room and collapsed on the sofa, completely numb after Silena's assault on his patience. It was clearly going to take every ounce of strength he had to get this done.

(Bukitodinos): OHH, OHH I got a theory! *raises hand madly*

Armok wants chaos, so when a world runs out of "chaotic energy" He stasis the world in it's last moments, sort of like a video on YouTube that loops, Armok collects the world and keeps it in a collection of worlds that died kicking and screaming. So when Headshoots and Syrupleaf died new worlds were created and everyone was reborn, FOR MORE CHAOS. Then Armok blanks the survivors memory's to prevent them from stopping the chaos then he adds new creatures, and watches the shit hit the fan.

Basically Armok is the dwarven equal of discord from MLP.

(Mr Frog): @storm:

We have built an entire thrice-entangled clusterfuck of a canon in the time since you started. Could you please go a bit faster if at all possible? 🙏

(Hanslanda): Yes, I like how the canon went from:

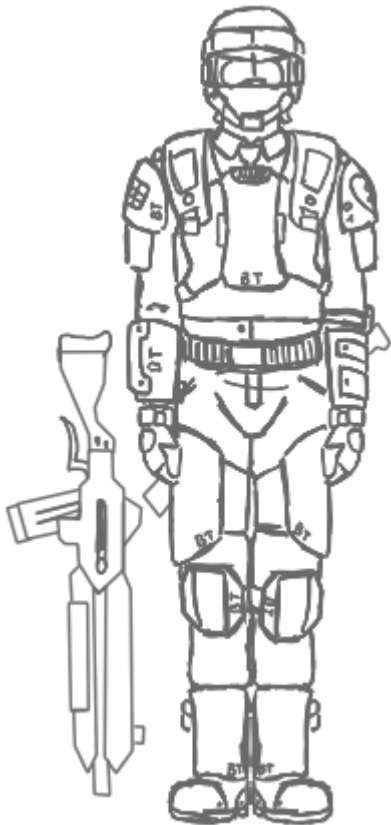
Questionable, did Syrupleaf happen? Or was the narrator unreliable? Armok restarted everything?

to

Oh my god, timeskipping transmultidimensional future-drug-addict bioengineer (dj?) is double-triple-recrossing (?) Ubermensch evil(?) company masters who happen to

be involved in a three way timewar with two evil (?) companies bent on controlling/destroying (?) the hideous dwarven monstrosities that are now swarming over the planet because the Ubermensch may or may not want them to be an army for him (?) and a possibly insane woodcutter is attempting to thwart the ruthless DJ's convoluted plot with the help of a possible elvish outcast/spy/dwarven skulker/unreliable narrator/love interest to a drugged foreign soldier who happens to have helped the bioengineer save the fortress from the terrorism of a lone (?) insane (?) dimensional traveler while in the background of all this, the timewar is progressing nicely, with armored vehicles hiding in the bushes only feet away from trained dwarven soldiers getting attacked by Holistic Spawn as the enemy of the timewar soldiers lay an ambush with high tech railguns and flails. Gaze upon our works, ye mighty, and despair. Spearbreakers is awesome.

(Splint): Rough version of a typical Ballpoint Technology Contractor's armor and attire. Yes, a tie is part of it, you'll know where it is and can tell as such. The gun is the Dwarven railgun, and the design Dorf!Mr Frog would be familiar enough with to copy.



And now some timewar.

[[Talviero's note: The following post involves timetravel. As Splint put it, "We accidentally the dwarven spacetime continuum. Sorry."]]

SPLINT:

"LZ Looks clear! I'm bringing us down!" The pilot said as the Moghopper lurched forward into descent. "Of course it's clear, no-one in their right mind would live here with all the ghosts." A contractor said. "I heard the gods left a memorial to the fortress outside its entrance... The gods man.... These dwarves must've really gone down kicking and screaming to get that kind of attention." Another said. They'd all been exchanging glances and stories they'd heard of that place.... Dwarves said that adventurers went there all the time to try and recover artifacts and never came back, that the ghosts of its defenders seemed to shrug off even being memorialized to follow their final orders to defend the fortress. Those rumors said that they had indeed been stubborn, but so stubborn and loyal to willingly stay on the mortal plane after death was frightening, And dwarven ghosts were always troublesome, but those here... Some said they went so far as to possess their own arms and armor...

"Alright, when we land, I want the following on me: Bugi, Koth, and Aret. The rest of you stay here and defend the Moghopper. If it gets smashed we'll have to walk all the way back to corporate and I don't think anyone here wants that." A small chorus of confirmations came back as the back door opened and the 22 contractors poured out, four going into the fortress' old wagon entrance. "Alright guys, we're on verbal and handsigns from here unless we get detected. I don't want any mistakes, so use your knives and swords before you resort to firing." Ecem said as they neared the first corner. And found themselves facing a graveyard.

Piles of rusted goblin armor and skeletons of all kinds, along with the occasional wagon frame littered the road, going on out of sight. "By Armok... This is horrible..." Aret said quietly. "The remains of a war long since fought everyone. Brush it off." Ecem said. He motioned for everyone to look down the next tunnel, a much thinner one. A drawbridge had fallen, its rusted chains visible in the wall and showing where they had given out. They looked at all the rusting iron pikes in the floors, astonished at their sheer number. Then Bugi cracked a flare and simply said "Anyone else wondering how deep these trenches are?" Everyone nodded and she tossed the flare, it going nearly a hundred feet before illuminating dozens of skeletons, some still spitted on pikes. "Holy shit..." Bugi said, while the other, aside from Ecem, simply stared in awe. SO many pikes, and so many skeletons on such a short stretch of ground. "Must've funneled them through here and massacred the survivors... Pretty smart for dwarves." Aret said, looking up at the gate. The group continued on, and noted something odd: A camera spike in the ceiling. It was obviously not working, showing signs of rust and having some small mushrooms and cave vines growing around it, but clearly someone had been watching this gate at some point.

They went in, and found a broken down trading depot, made from glumprong and chestnut planks. It was strange in this continent. Good and evil seemed to just be

words for biomes, with plants that grew only in good or evil places growing all over it with everything else. There were bags laden with old trade goods still hanging from pillars, destroyed wagons and... a disturbing old butcher's shop, that had all manner of long dried blood on it, and all manner of bones, even those of sentient. It had a sign in dwarven that read: BOMBZERO'S SHOP. DO NOT DISTURB. REST EASY BOMBZERO. "This is... This is very disturbing." Koth muttered. They continued in, and began searching the hallways. Stockpiles stuffed with either mugs or mechanisms and unused furniture, that was either falling apart or in pristine shape with tarps over them. Bugi had found an office, the doors smashed down and broken mugs all against the wall across from a desk laden with old books. And more mugs. The name placard had fallen off or been stolen at some point, so whoever used it clearly had anger issues. The most noticeable thing was a display case with the name "Stova" just barely legible under it, and the outline of a warhammer. The dining room had a lot of smashed furnishings, with the remains of several holistic spawn in the piles. And the bedroom looked tidy, save the piles of mugs everywhere gathering dust. But one thing in particular caught her eye. A very richly adorned toy boat.... She read about it in a history book, but couldn't recall the name. But she nicked it and stuffed it into her backpack, hoping no-one would notice. No ghosts, so perhaps the stories were just that? Stories.

They descended, as their map directions said to and came to the living level. They looked at the halls around them, dusty, with vegetation just beginning to find spaces to take root. Skeletons of dwarves and... less-dwarvenly creatures littered the place, the concentrations of remains and shattered rock warhammers and rusting dwarven mail became denser as they approached the dining hall. The rock doors were torn from their hinges and piles of dead holistic spawn were everywhere with many a dead dwarf with a hammer. Finally Aret broke the silence, with a legitimate question: "I thought this place was known for spears and pikes, not hammers..." "These weren't the soldiers," was all Ecem said. And it was true. The bodies with armor wore crude iron or looted goblin mail, indicated by their imagery of a long gone goblin nation. They hadn't seen any of the fortress soldiers' remains. They continued on, taking a beautiful pitchblende hammer encrusted with prase and decorated with emu bone spikes and a few of the more richly decorated mugs as souvenirs. They continued down a hall and made a right, coming to a door with two slots above it, one broken with a camera spike sticking out. "This is it. Koth. Thermals." Koth moved up and scanned it, disarming traps as she went. Someone had gone to great lengths to keep this room secure. After nearly thirty minutes of disarming and a scare with a teller mine ("Where the fuck would he have even gotten this!?" "Built it himself probably") they finally entered and looked around. Old chemicals sat on shelves, unused and probably tainted. Airtight jars with research specimens field boxes and in a corner were mugs in a box that was labeled 'BIOHAZARD' and had their middles burned out, indicating they'd been used with corrosive substances or just used one time too many with a boiler. There was a PEA in an open container, and while the grips were worn it was otherwise in good shape. And older model Ballpoint Tech stopped producing years ago. Ecem picked it up out of curiosity, and turned it on.

Which he hadn't expected it to do.

A face appeared, a rather haggard looking man, whom Ecem recognized as the bioengineer who got that busload of hippies killed about twenty years ago. Mr Frog.

"Hello, whoever you are. Seems you were dumb or smart enough to come into my room. I can only assume you're contractors from Ballpoint, as nobody in their right mind would come in here otherwise or make it in alive. I left this as a warning about the mission you're on. There's a fragmentation mine outside the old entry into the complex. You'll need a magnetic resonator to disarm it. And put this back if you would, I don't want you people touching my equipment without my permission, regardless of how badly it's degraded." The screen turned black, the message reading 'Preprogrammed shutdown. Goodbye.'

"Great. So he knew we'd be coming." Ecem said as he dropped the tablet into the box from whence it came. "I'd say we have a 99.99% chance of getting completely fucked when we go in." Bugi said as she looked around, and saw an open vent below a box of glass vials and old socks. "Found it! Still wanna proceed, sir?" she asked, secretly hoping he wouldn't.

"Pry the hatch open. We're doing our job." He said loudly in as confident a voice he could manage. This was it though, no going back...

(Aseaheru): Hey guess what I did? Looked for me in the fort and I am dead. There never was a Aseaheru and Minkot died shortly after my claiming. [[Talvieno's note: Aseaheru missed his dwarf. His dwarf never died.]]

(Hanslanda): Yeah, you're a spawn IIRC.

(Splint): It was Ashsaber and.... Fuck I don't remember but I thought Asea was killed.... No, no He's alive. Somehow outran the first zombie horde and escaped to safety. Probably not doing so well psychologically though...

(Hanslanda): Who in this fort *is* doing well psychologically? 🤔

(Splint): Well I imagine Asea's dorf, when not in public, sitting in the corner of his room muttering about zombies. Everyone else just drinks the sleeping meds Mr Frog distills to help everyone sleep with Ashsaber and other spawn's screeching.

(Hanslanda): Oh god, everyone in the fort is heavily medicated and boozed up just to deal with background noise. That's a bit hardcore.

SPLINT:

Koth forced the hatch in the vents open. Its hinges had long become rusty and the cover broke off under the strain of the contractor trying to force it open, resulting in her falling through. "You alright Koth?" Aret said, helping her up. "Yeah I'm fine. Who's on point boss?" "Bugi. She's got the bomb detection gear." Ecem said, and motion for the squad to move. Sure enough, after six solid minutes of corridors, Bugi's thermal and magnetic detector saw it, right outside an aging airlock door. One Frag mine, of Parasol make. Bugi quickly applied the resonator, little sparks showing it's had done as needed, frying the detonator and rendering it mostly harmless.

"Think it'll open?" Aret said as they approached under camouflage. "Only one way to find out!" Koth said as she pried the door open. The one thing she always had was her freakish strength. They slipped in, the room showing just as much disuse as the doors and hatches. They weren't kidding when they said old escape tunnels. They went down a dingy corridor, noting the piles of bins labels "Failed experiments." After seemingly being lost for hours, they came to a room filled with largely broken down monitors. The lights were on, such as they were indicating this room still had power. "How far up is this narcissist's damn lab!?" Bugi said as she sat on a dirty office chair. "Six more to get to the first floor of the new facility." Koth said, looking at her Tacpad. "Fuckin' great...." Aret said, the annoyance painfully clear in his voice. Then they all jumped, Aret ready to blow away the terminal that flickered to life.

Mr Frog was in the screen, messing with a teller mine. He didn't even look up as he spoke. "Glad to see you guys are still alive. I'm in the upper floors of the facility, in the housing wing for researchers. When you get here I'll - Damn it! Where's that soldering iron... There we go- I'll have a job for you. There's a whole lot of things I need taken care of, and right now you four are the only viable means I have to do it. Or however many of you are still alive by the end of it if you get caught." The terminal shut down, leaving the team confused. However, they continued on, barely avoiding detection with their optic camo. After several more hours, they finally found a friendly blip on their pads: They were outside his room. Ecem knocked, and shortly afterward Mr Frog ushered them in, though to anyone else he seemed to be talking to himself.

"You can decloak if you'd like. If there's one thing that mad man knows it's that his own employees are easy to piss off when you violate their privacy. Now, onto business." He walked over to a workbench laden with lab equipment and things to... make explosives?

He pulled open his drawer revealing a rack of mines. But then he yanked it up, revealing less well made ones with timers attached. "They know I have this first rack. I talked them into letting me try to make improvements." He said, almost as if he was bored already. But then his tone changed to one of deadly seriousness, as he grabbed a PEA out of the drawer. "I need this delivered to me during Paintbrush Turkey's reign. I've made improvements to one of my older weapon designs. It has

the specs, what I'll need, all of it." The Contractors were horribly confused by this mess. "And now onto the mines. These have been rigged up to make decent timed explosives, and I need the weapons and bioengineering R n D departments destroyed to set Joseph back... Just a few years."

"So you told us about the mine in the tunnel...." Ecem said quietly, realizing why they hadn't been allowed to just explode against the wall. "So I could have people who know what they're doing take care of this. I'd do it myself but Joseph would suspect something if all the places I visited today ended up mysteriously exploding." "Alright, we'll do it." Ecem responded. "But in return you disable any automated defenses give us any information on how this lunatic is getting recruits." Mr Frog nodded. "A done deal. I still have limited access to Ballpoint, so I'll send a message to Upmanage after this place is in chaos." "Alright. Koth, Aret, grab the charges." Ecem said, motioning for them to get the bombs while he tucked the PEA into his body armor. "So, where's our objective at?"

"Weapons is down on floor 23. Bioengineering on 22. The charges are set to 30 minutes, giving you ample time to set them and run. Once the first one goes off, it'll cause a sequential string of explosions and you should be long gone." Mr Frog said as he placed the minerack back into the desk. "Good luck. You'll probably need it." He added in as he opened the door and the contractors filed out in optic camo.

[[Talvieno's note: We now continue with our regularly-scheduled meta-clusterfuck. Thank you for your patience.]]

(PaintbrushTurkey): ok so I'll provide a running update here (can't resist sharing): and a proper one later on don't say you haven't been warned
HAHA got them all in no casualties 6 new dwarves 3 male 3 female, did I mention that one of the males is an adept swordsdwarf?

(Splint): Migrants.... S-survived?
WHAT FUCKING HERESY IS THIS!?

(PaintbrushTurkey): the marksdwarves (fortress guard) are also emplaced and decimating the reanimating zombie horde, whilst training their marksdwarf skill

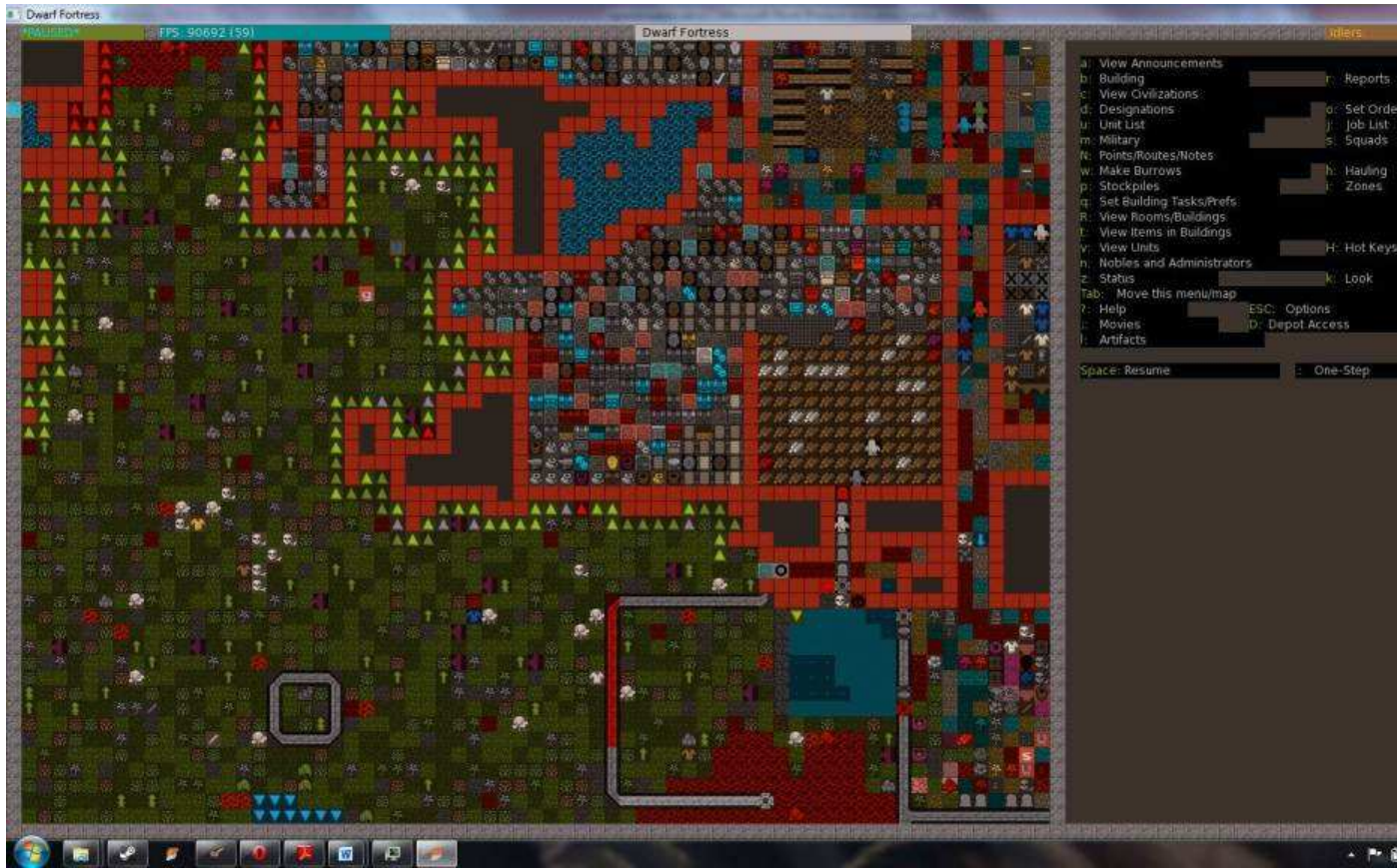
(Mr Frog): This is too good to be true. We're gonna get a siege of 80 Spawn mounted on necromancers or something in a few months, I just know it.

PAINTBRUSHTURKEY:

I'm suspicious of Splint, I think he is up to something, I'd swear he is hoarding mugs in his room, too. I think someone needs to keep an eye on him, at least until I know what he is planning. I have thus expanded our Fortress guard to 10 members, this has the additional benefit of taking our "trained" military up to 40 dwarves, I have also assigned stations to them, 2 to the EIDS (Early Intruder Detection System), somehow the kiwi got killed by some undead that wandered in after being resurrected inside our guard tower, they have crossbows so can fire at any intruders below, 2 more in the guard tower above it, and another 2 in the guard tower outside the trade depot, this should hopefully keep the map reasonably safe once I have cleared all the zombies and should allow me to focus on securing and exploring the caverns. It also has occurred to me that whoever gave the military has been rather harsh on them, they don't even get time to eat, how are hungry soldiers meant to fight effectively, I have reduced the minimum number of soldiers required to be on duty to 8.

A somewhat breathless guard has just burst into my office yelling something about migrants, I wonder what they were thinking... I have ordered the drawbridge outside the depot to be lowered, but it appears to be broken, I think we have been sabotaged, this confirms my earlier call for more personnel in the fortress guard, however when I asked the captain of the guard if anyone of them had seen anything I only got a replies along the lines "No, they're busy and have to pick up my equipment" I think he should pull the other one, it's got bells on...., how long does it take to put on some armor? I mean seriously, if he doesn't get hit bunch of guards organized I would see to it that he'd spend the rest of his life cleaning out the animal pens!

Anyways, I have been forced to have the migrants make camp, it appears that zombies don't understand speech, but miraculously can sense if someone left a door unlocked, I think this is something that needs investigating as it may allow us to combat the zombie threat more effectively.

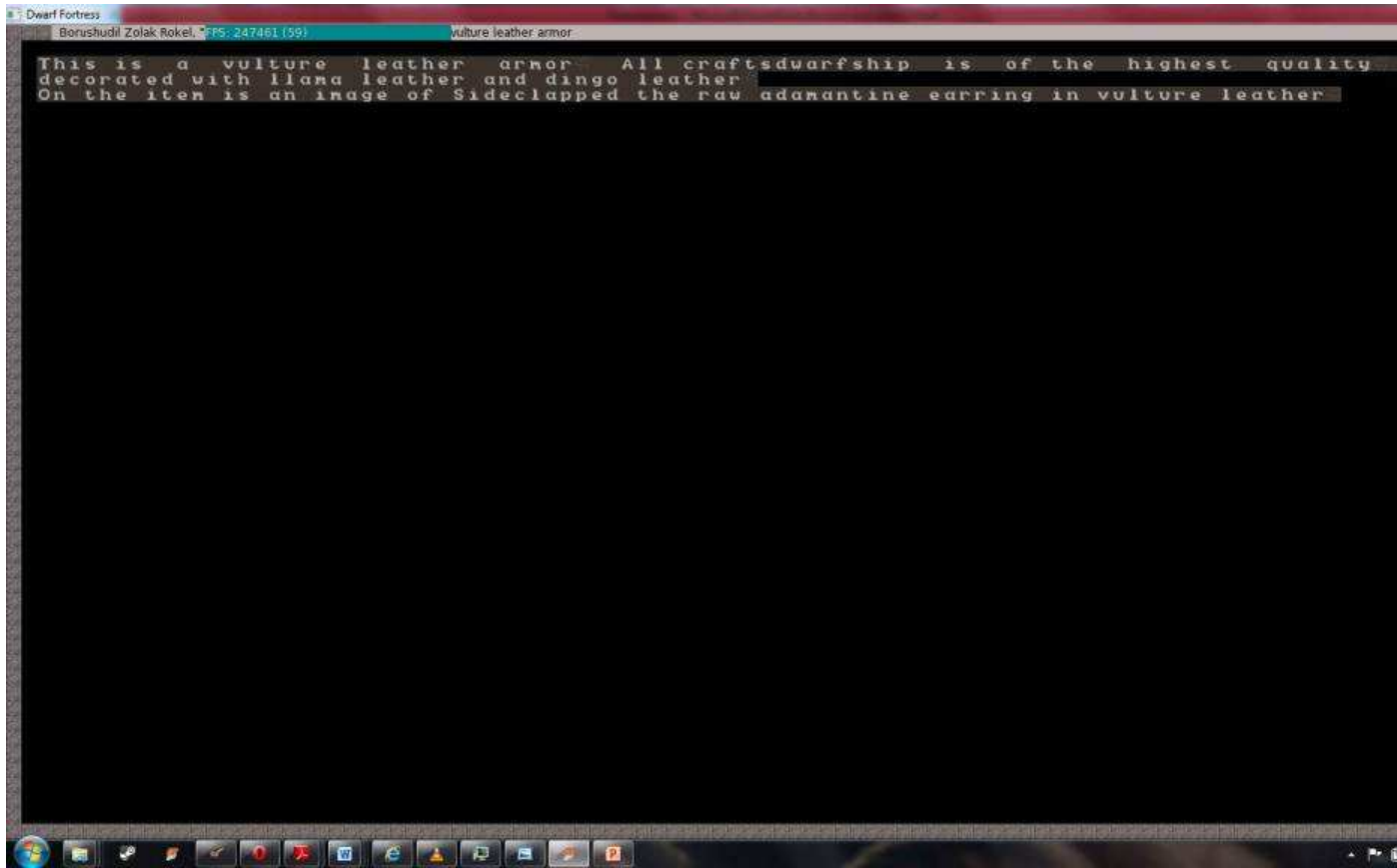


I have to commend our miners they are either incredibly efficient or incredibly bored, I had barely mentioned where an escape tunnel needed to be dug when they started swinging their picks, the migrants rushed in and certain members of the fortress guard had to be physically restrained from running out there and picking up equipment, I think I may have been a little too harsh with their commander. On the bright side most of them are now equipped and ready for action. So long Brainsuckers...., speaking of the undead the ghost that was wandering around the fortress has been put to rest, good riddance I say. I have also noticed a rather hollow clonk when I examined the hospital, closer examination leads me to believe that there is a stairway in the way of the bucket as it travels towards the water in the caverns..... I have fixed this by shifting the stairway to allow the bucket to move freely.

Felsite:

On my way back to the barracks I passed Corai who running through the corridors babbling about animal skins, he also refuses to let anybody inside his workshop, I have sent Fisher to investigate, I'm told she has previous experience in treating the violently insane....

Fischer just reported back to me and it appears that Corai has created a masterful suit of leather armor, I can't bring myself to tell him that we don't use that anymore and are capable of using metal, even adamantite, but he seems happy enough.



Corai has been pestering me to come and examine his leather armor *sigh* I suppose it will keep him happy....

It has just struck me as to how dirty this place is I have ordered Splint to see to it that this place gets cleaned up, he is the manager after all so I think this is part of his job description, I wonder how he got the job in the first place, I think he is up to something.

I have just had a very excited Simon run into my office and tell me that we really should be starting to haul some mugs to the depot as some elves had been sighted on the horizon, I think watching them try to sneak through the horde of undead at our trading entrance will be fun, I have declared this day to be a holiday with free drinks and complimentary crossbow bolts for everyone. I think at the very least 50% of us just want to see what happens when an elf get startled in the middle of a horde of zombies *HEHEHE*

Damn these elves, it looks like they lead a bunch of goblins right to our doorstep, although I admit that it was to general entertainment, the odds of the elves actually reaching our gates currently stand at 100 to 1 so I do suppose Simon stands to make a lot of money if he wins his bet, which I suppose is a fair enough incentive to sympathize with the elves, at least I hope that this is reasoning.....

The spawn are here, I count 9 (1 of whom appears to be riding a war grizzly bear) on the horizon, the race is officially on, several posters advertising ongoing bets have appeared throughout the fortress, I'm not sure who is responsible for this but it certainly has heightened morale, I have included a transcript of one of the posters

for reference purposes:

Quote

WHO SHALL REACH THE GATES OF SPEARBREAKERS?

Place your bets now!

- ELVES (100:1)
- SPAWN (1:1)
- GOLDINS (10:1)
- UNDEAD (1:1)
- NONE (1:100)

(Mr Frog): I think there's a stealthed necromancer hanging around outside, which is why the Spawn are losing so hard. Anything they kill just pops back up a second later, and they're not smart enough to hunt down and kill the necro. The Spawn are tough as hell, but -- unfortunately -- 'tough as hell' is a finite value and thus not nearly enough to weather the zombies.

On the plus side, we now have an automated defense system that is literally mathematically-impossible for invaders to survive. Because *Spearbreakers*.

HANSLANDA:

First letter from Urist to Baron **This word written here is illegible, smudged out by blood**

To our Great and Majestic Baron,

Your humble servant Urist Okablokum greets you from the border fortress of Spearbreakers. If you recall, I was sent here under your orders to assess the strategic situation here. After arriving here, I realized that this task will take far more effort than I had realized. First of all, the defensive position of this fort changes nearly every other year. I've seen a new entrance put in and closed up, a perfectly good entryway ignored for no apparent reason, and the original entrance is apparently completely inoperable. That, sir, is *just the entryways*.

Most recently, they have begun a full scale mobilization of their military. I've seen dozens of dwarves training in the most improbable of places. Old mineshafts, the forges, personal bedrooms, by the original entrance, I even once saw them performing some kind of hideous massed combat exercise in the barracks. Their smiths have begun working nonstop, since about a week ago, they've churned out enough armor for twice as many dwarves as they have, with orders for far more on the way.

I've found the dwarves that reside here to be the most interesting part of my mission. It seems that almost all of them have peculiar eccentricities that in no way

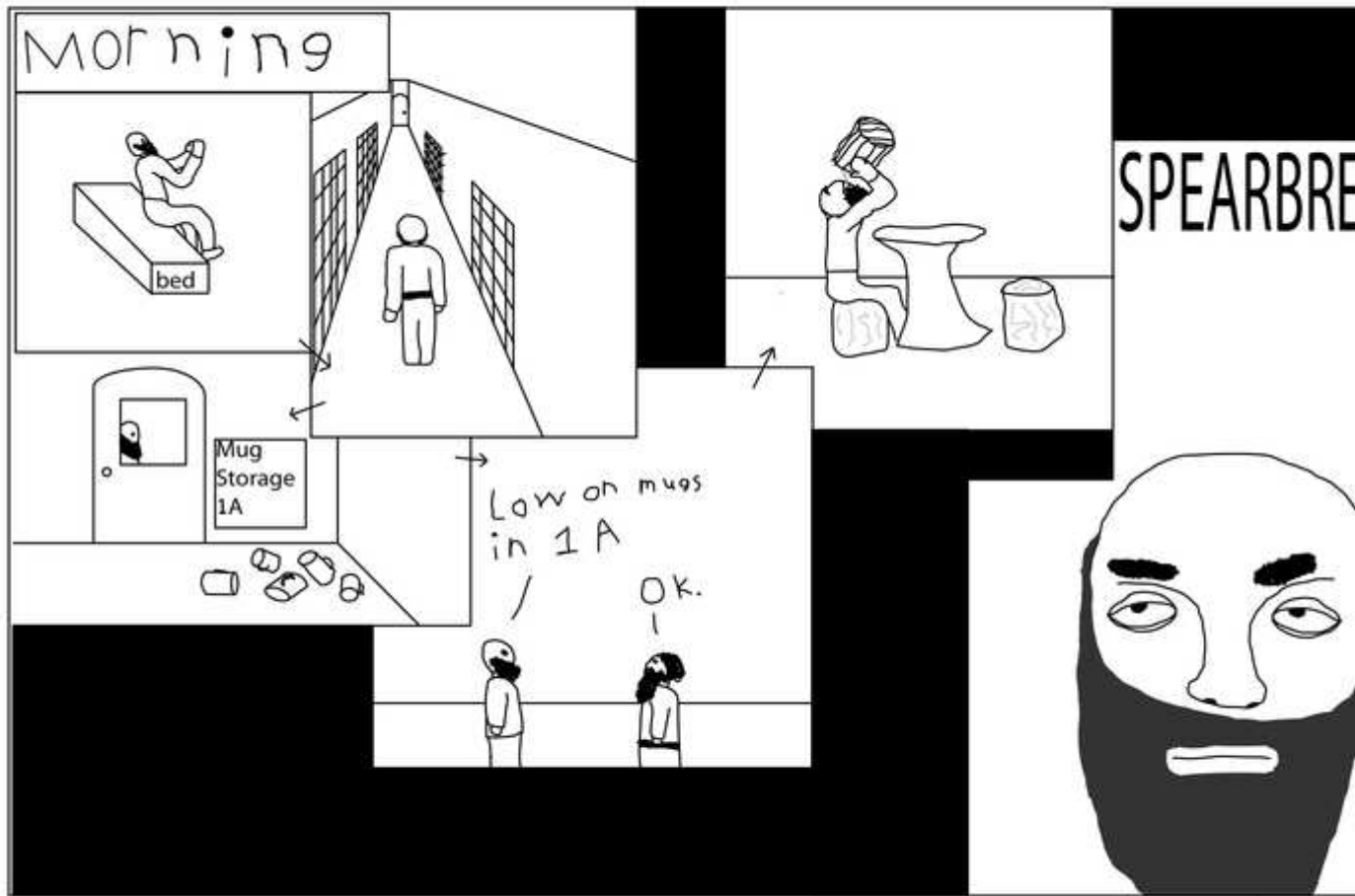
interfere with their prowess at their jobs. In fact, these eccentricities often help them perform their obligations. Another odd thing I have noticed is the massive amount of mugs. They're everywhere. I don't mean there are bunches in the dining room. I mean they are literally everywhere. I've found mugs in places no mug should ever go. If you send a return letter, I recommend you request they either start exporting the mugs faster or start making fewer of them.

In closing, I will require as little as two more months, and as much as a whole year to finish my mission here. It is my hopes that the caravan master reaches you safely to deliver this letter.

Sincerely,
Urist Okablokum

LLASRAM:

Behold! All of my terrible art skills! The comic focuses on the dwarf who has a portrait at the far right, opinions are welcome so I can improve it if needed.



(Paintbrushturkey): we have 10 legendary pikedwarves, 10 legendary hammerdwarves well 20 really but 10 of them use crossbows, so their melee effectiveness is close to 0 and 10 legendary axedwarves (to be honest those are the immobilizers of the military when those guys go in there is bits flying 2 z levels up, it's glorious) I have also assigned everybody else to a squad which means they all go about their business armed and armored (a result of nearly loosing a dwarf to a goblin skeleton earlier (he's still alive but only just)) which is the result of having 450 bits and pieces of armor in the queue, as to bolts, well we don't have any bronze left.... I found the necros by just unforbidding everything above ground and letting dwarves roam and then sending Fischer necrohunting currently we have 2811 bits of ammo kicking around the place ;-)

(Splint): I vote we make the danger rooms have been dorf! Mr Frog's idea as a makeshift battle simulator.

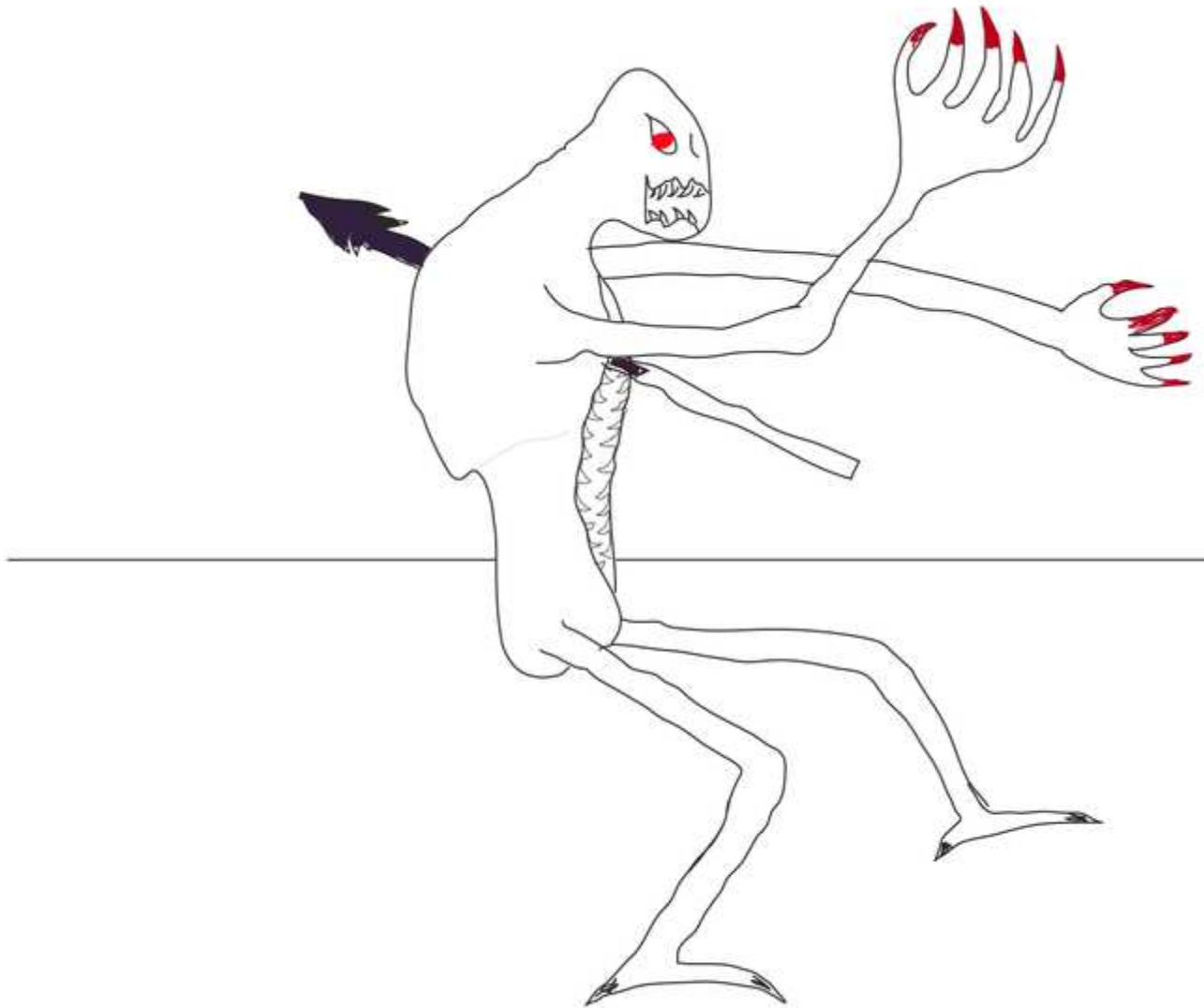
(Paintbrush-turkey): quite fitting given the broken toes we got from them :-)

(Mr Frog): Mr Frog: "For our next test, we will be simulating a close-range enemy encounter with an unknown neurotoxin being flushed into the room through the air vents. I'm not quite sure what the unknown neurotoxin does, but it probably isn't universally-fatal. We'll be finding out how deadly it is shortly, in any case. Happy training!"

(Splint): To which Fischer replies "What in the hell is a neurotox-" -door slam-

LLASRAM:

My vision of a spawn.



SPLINT:

It was a long winded, irritating task. The team had split up into pairs, Ecem and Aret covering the weapons labs, Bugi and Koth the bioresearch. Koth and Aret went out of their way as they planted the charges under or on the side of unoccupied desks to rig tripwires out of the Mr Frog's mines on the fire extinguishers, and when they stumbled upon it, cut the water and power to those sectors' fire fighting systems, though two janitors were stuffed into a locker with their throats slit first. For good measure Ecem left a charge rigged to the door. After hours of dodging and hugging the wall, and where needed committing another murder, the group sent a quick two

blip message to Mr Frog's PEA. The charges were armed and they were on their way out. Mr Frog, satisfied Joseph should be delayed, armed their timers.

"Guys, this is Ecem. I need a sitrep, over." Ecem said quietly as they left Mr Frog's old room in Lokumokab. "We got a slight problem boss. Someone's on to us." Came a shaky voice. "What!? Who??" Ecem demanded to know. Unless someone found the bodies, the charges shouldn't have gone off yet for another 25 minutes, unless Mr Frog tricked them....

"Well the Moghopper's scanners picked up two platoons of troops bearing Eris IFF Transponders and two IFVs with unknown weapon composition." Ecem let a slew of obscenities fly at this before going on. "THAT FUCKER KNEW THE WHOLE TIME!!!" He bellowed. "TOPSIDE. NOW."

By the time the panic stricken team arrived they found two contractors ducking in the wagon entry, both clutching railgun inflicted wounds. "How bad?" Ecem said flatly. "We'll live... The stims just haven't kicked in yet..." one of the contractors replied. The quartet headed out into a firestorm. While the enemy armor was nowhere to be seen yet, much of the immediate area was on fire because of the Moghopper gunner's overzealous application of incendiary rounds and rockets, much to both sides' dismay. Ecem and Bugi ducked behind a strange steel slab while Aret and Koth split off and joined a group in a fresh crater. "Why don't we just switch on the optic camo?" Bugi asked, nudging Ecem. "From the looks of things they might be using thermals to track us. The fire's messing up their aim, see? It won't matter what we do in terms of visibility.... I got it. Everyone, polarize visors!" Ecem yelled into his comm and the open air. Thankfully none of the enemy seemed to hear over the shooting and roaring blaze. A few flash grenades caused a break in the stream of railgun fire and the pair bolted out of the fighting to an unoccupied dip in the ground on the enemy's flank.

Then, two missiles whizzed by the Moghopper and prompted the pilot to freak out, who deployed his flares when two more were shot at him, causing them to whiz about erratically until one slammed into the ground, having misfired and the other exploding as it smashed into the already decrepit tower with the strange bridge leading off it. The tower came down, unsurprisingly, and the area was shrouded in thick grey dust, at which point Ecem grabbed Bugi by the collar of her armor and shouted at her "On me! Follow my lead!" They darted into the smoke, taking advantage of the chaos while Koth told the Moghopper to waive off until the fight was done.

The pair darted into some bushes, the shooting having resumed just a moment or two ago, though now it seemed to just be aimless erratic firing because of the smoke and fire. Then they saw them: The IFVs. They bore the symbol of the madman, [insert whatever the hell it is here.] "Bugi, I got the far one, you get the near. Good?" "Sounds good." Bugi said, bringing two large fighting knives to bear. She sprinted over to the first, grabbing one of the Eris troopers and effectively decapitated him when she cut his throat, a little flap of meat being the only thing holding his head onto his body. A second, who'd turned when he need to reload while in a small dip, was horrified to see his comrade drop, blood gushing from the open wound. He raised his weapon, only for it to inexplicably get yanked upward and a knife blade's shape appearing in his chest.* He was gone before the knife even left his chest, his body going limp as both his spine and heart were destroyed by the oversized blade. Bugi clambered aboard the war machine, which seemed to have suffered a weapon malfunction with its launchers being unable to autoloading. And

unfortunately for the victims inside operating it, Bugi threw a phosphorus grenade into the cycling hatch of the launcher. She dove off and rolled into a crater, watching her handiwork as the IFV exploded violently, extra missiles cooking off and going in random directions, largely exploding harmlessly in the air. A simple "What the fuck!?" When she realized she'd rolled onto another trooper prompted him to be shot in the head with a sidearm as he unknowingly struggled to get up with the contractor on top of him.

Ecem yanked his knife out, and watched Bugi climb up, knowing full well her intent when he saw a little hatch opening and closing in a nonsensical cycle. He slid into the next crater, carving out one strange creature's throat and ramming his knife into the other's skull through his visor when he panicked and tried to run out of the pit. A third wounded trooper met the same end as the second, an oversized knife blade being sent up into his head from the joining point of his throat and head. When the first IFV exploded, Ecem knew he had to act quickly. Even more so when he heard the hiss of another rocket's exhaust. He climbed out of the crater, drawing his sidearm and sending a few rounds into a dwarf and a human, both of whom's innards were more or less turned into paint on the IFV. He hopped onto it, shooting another trooper in the back of the head who was running by before flinging himself in front of the driver's port. The he decloaked, rifle in hand.

"Hey do you hear something?" Rakust asked absentmindedly while he initiated the missile cycling program. "Besides the shooting I mean." "Not really.... Wait.... Yeah I do." A slight clanging could be heard from the driver side. "What the hell is that?" The other trooper said, the clanging being sporadic but still annoying. Then out of the blue, a man decloaked, a rifle ready in his right hand while his left held him in front of the driver's port. "WHAT THE FU-" was Rakust's last statement when the port shattered, the sound of a railgun firing on automatic bouncing around the armored hull. The other unlucky human, now scared and horrified at the remains of his friend, which had not but twisted metal and shredded meat between the shoulders of his armor. Then to add insult to injury, a grenade, with a bright and cheery blue "WP" on it bounced in and clattered to the back of the IFV. The poor trooper was left dumbfounded when the IFV erupted in a burst of flame and secondary ignitions.

The remaining Eris troopers, with a number of them known to be dead and their IFVs exploding for no apparent reason, finally broke and fled the field, leaving the dead and dying to the mercy of the Ballpoint Contractors.** "Morul, come back in. Situation contained." A contractor said over the comm. A few more railshots could be heard, indicating executions being done as the Moghopper came back in for a landing. "On, sitrep." Ecem said, taking his helmet off. "We lost Ozi, Osp, and Arin. Ilpi, Liru, Tod, Asri, Hasor, and Suku were injured, the first four from that tower getting knocked down, while Hasor Suku took railgun rounds to the upper and lower body respectively. All in all, we did pretty well. Killed 34 hostiles, excluding the IFVs, although to be fair most of them were executions." Ecem nodded as On wrapped up. His midsection was sore, and his arms ached from the climbing and one handing a rifle on full automatic. "Good... Get the wounded loaded up.... I'm gonna take a nap in the cockpit with Morul and Lokum..."

After another ten minutes or so, a series of explosions echoed into the area, indicating that perhaps Joseph hadn't known about the charges. Ecem however, like the rest of the survivors, didn't care. He simply slept the whole way back to corporate.

* I didn't feel I needed to mention them activating their camo.

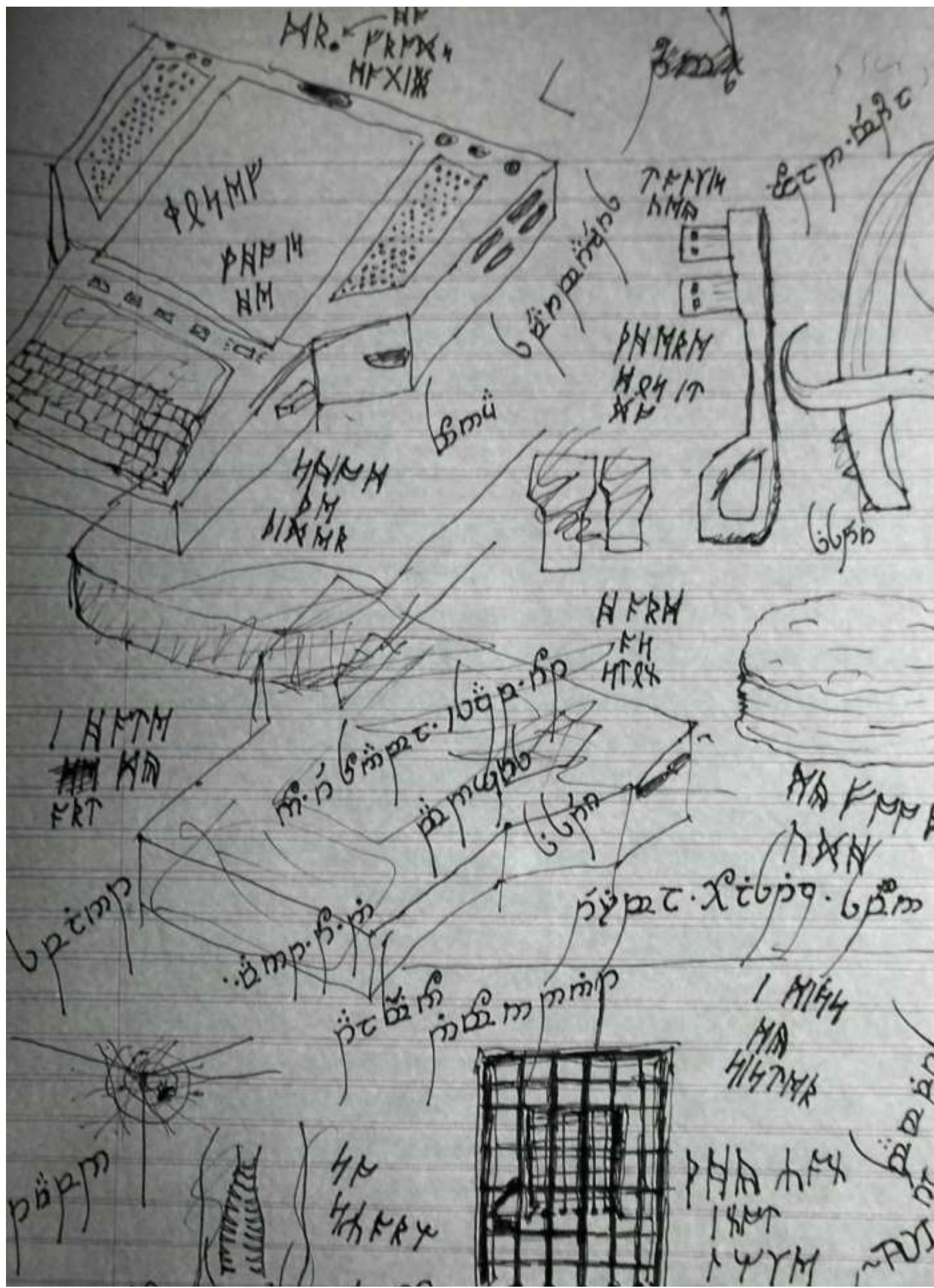
** These two have fought off far worse at Shockedtowns. Plus a bunch of random flatlines and the IFVs exploding behind you can't be good for morale.

TALVIENO:

[[Talvieno's note: Placed here so you could see it before you read the post it refers to.]]

It's a lot harder than I thought to draw in-character. lol But it was fun. 😊 I figured since she only has one notebook to write in for a number of months, her pages would end up being very cluttered, and she wouldn't start over on a new page if she drew something poorly. Also, it has notebook page lines. My fault. 🙄 I'm just going to explain it by saying that HARD had a very nice journal before Vanya took it from his lifeless hands.

With all that in mind, here's a doodle page from Vanya's journal. In reference to:
"The pages following the previous entry are covered in various doodled drawings in charcoal pencil. Vanya isn't the best artist, but you can recognize many of the things she drew: an elven dagger, Mr Frog's PEA, and a strange key, among other things. Finally the artwork ends, and you find another entry from the young elven woman."



TALVIENO:

More from V's Journals

The pages following the previous entry are covered in various doodled drawings in charcoal pencil. Vanya isn't the best artist, but you can recognize many of the things she drew: an elven dagger, Mr Frog's PEA, a strange key, and a poorly drawn popup book, among other things. Finally the artwork ends, and you find another entry from the young elven woman.

They say that if you spend a long enough time with anyone, you know almost everything about them. I suppose the same goes with places you live or stay: I know my little cell as well as I used to know Spearbreakers itself... as well as I used to know my little sister...

The walls in my cell are carved directly from cold, gray stone, and neither smoothed or engraved. The only exit is a rusty iron portcullis that lowers into the floor when a locked lever in the hallway outside is pulled; even if I could get a set of keys from a guard, I wouldn't be able to escape. There's a little toilet at one corner of my cell, and the other corner has a roughly-carved shelf that's supposed to serve as a bed. In between the two corners rests a heavy granite chair, only lightly smoothed. I get my meals twice a day: once at breakfast, once at dinner. It's usually an old biscuit and a waterskin, dropped in through the hole in the roof of my room. They don't give me alcohol, but I don't really have any problem with that... being an elf does have a few oft-overlooked benefits.

But I have something more important to write about right now... Mr Frog came to see me a few days ago. I hadn't been expecting his visit... I hadn't been expecting anyone at all. Actually, I'd been asleep when he arrived.

~~~

I awoke slowly to the sensation of someone shaking my shoulder. "Vanya," I heard a voice say in my dreams, and it startled me awake.

I rolled away from the wall in a fright and almost fell off the bed-shelf, looking about wildly.

"Careful," someone spoke, as gentle hands kept me from falling and sat me upright. As my blurry vision cleared, I was able to make out the shape of a cloaked figure. I felt my hands move themselves clumsily to my hair, not so much to smooth it, but to cover my ears. My hair hadn't been brushed in weeks, as I hadn't been allowed a brush. I'd used my fingers as best as I could, but it just doesn't work as well... and I also badly needed to bathe.

My awakener took my upwards-creeping hands and put them in my lap. "Vanya, wake up," the voice said again, and I slowly recognized who it was.

"Mr Frog," I guessed, blinking my closing eyes in an attempt to stay awake, as much as to clear them. Living so close to the cells of the ever-screaming Spawn means you're always tired.

"Correct," he replied. "I said I'd be back."

Still half-asleep, I could feel my lips twisting into a frown. "Please don't kill me," I

begged, bewildered, my voice breaking. I almost tried to turn and lie back down, as if I could sleep him away, but he caught me again by the arms and kept me sitting up.

"I'm not going to kill you," he said. His voice lacked the cold edge I'd grown familiar to. "I do need you to drink something for me, though."

The fog of sleep was finally beginning to lift from my mind. I looked in his eyes searchingly before I spoke again, in a whisper, "I'm your next guinea pig, aren't I..." Mr Frog gave a slight shake of the head. "No. This won't do anything harmful to you, and in a few days you can forget you ever drank it." He offered me a small glass filled with a clear, red-tinted liquid.

I made no move to take it, wanting nothing more than for him to leave. I'd saved his life, but it didn't mean I had to like him, and it *especially* didn't mean I trusted him.

"Mmm-mmm," I said negatively as I shook my head in protest, turning away.

"Smell it," he suggested. "It *must* taste better than what they've been feeding you. It's from my own private stock, and I don't part with it lightly."

I'm ashamed to admit that that got my attention. He held it up, and I leaned forwards to take a sniff. It was wine, and it smelled deliciously of strawberries. But I still wasn't convinced. "What did you put in it?"

"Nothing harmful."

"But what's in it?"

"Just a truth serum. You don't have anything to hide, now do you?"

This last was offered almost as a challenge. If I refused it, he could assume that I *did* have something to hide... but I was already taking the glass in my hands. It tasted wonderful, and I gulped it down possibly faster than I should have.

"That's a good girl," he said, taking it back and stepping towards the middle of the room. "I'll be back in a day or so. Turn away now - lie back down and go to sleep." I didn't.

"Turn away, I said," he repeated, the gentleness leaving his voice.

Not wanting to invoke his wrath, I complied. Behind me, I heard the portcullis raise, and then lower again. When I turned back, he was gone. I still haven't figured out how he managed to escape.

My stomach felt queasy that night.

A day later, he returned. I was awake when he arrived, and saw him jump lightly down from the hole in the ceiling, his cloak flapping loudly in the air as he fell the nine feet to the ground.

I was sitting cross-legged on my shelf with my journal in hand, which I put to the side. "Welcome back," I said softly. "Why are you here now?"

He straightened, and pushed my cell's chair across the floor to where he could sit opposite me, facing me. Taking a notebook and pencil from his cloak, he responded.

"I've come to ask you a few questions. Will you respond truthfully?"

"I'm not sure if I'll want to," I said, surprising myself. I wondered why I'd been so blunt.

Mr Frog answered my unasked question. "I see the serum is doing its work. Don't try to fight it, you'll only hurt yourself. I had to invent a new recipe just for you - you should feel special."

"I'm the only elf in a fortress of dwarves... I feel special enough already, thank you."

"And that's exactly why I had to. The elven physiology is different from that of dwarves."

"Now," he continued, "If it worked properly, you'll find yourself compelled to speak your mind, and compelled to speak the truth. Your memory has also been

temporarily improved."

"Mr Frog?" I interrupted, "do you really think I'm a spy?"

"I don't jump to conclusions."

"You thought I was a spy before..." I prodded.

His brow furrowed in displeasure. "Originally the fact that you were an elf, that you were listed in the records of Ballpoint as a spy, and that one of my blueprints had disappeared was enough for me to believe it. However, you went to Splint's office, knowing you could be caught. You could still be a spy, for all I know, and just not a very smart one. But for some reason these memories are unclear to me..." He said this last almost to himself, and his voice trailed off.

I decided to take advantage of the silence. "I saved your life," I reminded him, hoping he hadn't forgotten.

It shook him from his thoughts. "That actually works against you. If you were spying on my work, my death would be destructive to your position. It would be in your best interests to save my life."

"But I wasn't spying..." My heart sank as I said it.

"That remains to be seen. Do you have anything you wish to hide?"

"Yes," I whispered.

Mr Frog raised an eyebrow. "And that would be?"

"My ears."

For a moment I thought I caught a smile on his face. "If that's all, then let's begin."

"All right."

He made a note in his notebook and began. "Think back to your childhood. What do you remember?"

"A lot..." It wasn't a lie. For some reason I just wanted to make it difficult for him.

He sighed and looked up at me. "Vanya, if you fight this, it will only take longer."

"I'm sorry, Mr Frog," I said.

"Good," he said. "Now, think back to when you were four. Where did you live?"

"The mountainhome."

"How well do you remember how the mountainhome looked when you were four?"

I almost said "not well", but suddenly found I could recall everything from that age with incredible clarity. I could see my granmomma in my mind's eye as clearly as if she was there; I saw the old familiar bed where I used to sleep in my granpa's apartment at the mountainhome, the great caravans arriving and departing, the old toys I used to play with. "How do I... how is it so clear? How can I remember it so well?" I asked breathlessly, awestruck.

"The drugs in the liquid you drank yesterday, of course," Mr Frog said dismissively.

"Now, tell me about your life as a child. What are some things that helped make you who you are today?"

I found myself almost hallucinating, picturing the beautiful halls of Tathurkeskal in the mountains of The Amber Barbs. Everything was so beautiful compared to Spearbreakers. There weren't bodies and bones littering the halls, nor were there mugs piled in the corners. There were almost no dark alleyways at all. Even the skulkers must've had a special home carved out for them. I sent my thoughts toward my Granpa's apartments. "My grandfather was a stonecarver, and my grandmother a metalworker. I lived with them, and my sister. My grandfather never liked us much... sometimes he would yell at us, and tell us we were lucky he'd taken us in. My grandmother defended us, and on occasion he'd get upset at her for that, too. I had to be a mother to my sister, even at the age of four. I was always afraid... so very afraid... I worried we'd be found out, or that Granpa might hurt us. Few dwarves like elves, and my grandfather was among those who hated us most."

I snapped back to reality for a moment, looking at Mr Frog triumphantly. "My sister *was* real. You said she wasn't."

"Your remembering her doesn't mean anything," he said, tapping his notebook with his pencil and writing something down.

I frowned. "And why doesn't it? I remember everything about her," I insisted. "I used to read fairy tales to her at night, *every* night before we went to bed, out of a big book. She wanted to be just like King Cacame, one of the characters. She hated elves like my grandfather did, and wanted to make him proud. She even wanted to join the military eventually, and when we were younger she always wanted us to practice swordfighting."

"Do you remember her face?" He spoke abruptly, shattering my thoughts like a mug through a gem window.

In my mind I pictured my old room; my bed; my sister's bed. I pictured the face of my Granmomma again, so vivid in my mind, and the ever-scowling one of my grandfather. But I paused when I got to my sister... it was blank. I saw nothing. I found it mildly annoying, and I was soon pressing myself harder to remember her. Mr Frog spoke through the vision, his volume increasing at a slow but steady pace. "Do you remember her face? Do you remember her voice? Do you remember her laughs or tears, her frowns or smiles? Can you actually recall swordfighting with her at all?"

I saw myself standing in a torchlit room, holding a wooden sword, thrusting and parrying. I tried as hard as I could to place her, but no matter how I tried, I saw no one in that room but myself... I switched time forwards in my mind to when we arrived at Spearbreakers, and saw myself arrive alone, carrying a single bag that carried only my belongings. I relived more memories, but found to my horror that not even one of them contained her. I felt my shoulders droop with shock and disappointment as the realization slowly sucked me from the beauty of my onetime paradise to the cold, hard reality of my prison cell.

"I don't remember her at all," I managed defeatedly in disbelief, my body beginning to shake with repressed sobs. Mr Frog stood and slowly walked to my side, patting my shoulder in a rough imitation of consolation. I burst into tears.

"It's all right," he said, as if it would be reassuring. "She just never existed."

I turned to him in anger. "She *did* exist!" I yelled. "She *was* real! I had a sister; she was beautiful and funny, and her name was..." I stopped, searching my memory for something that didn't seem to exist.

He frowned slightly, almost empathetically. "You don't even remember her name..." he said softly, slowly shaking his head.

I broke.

Unhindered, tears cascaded down my cheeks as I shook with sobs, audible for the first time in years. He backed away and began pacing across the room, but I hardly noticed. I'd always felt that my sister had been my whole world; all I had to live for. She'd been the reason I'd kept trying to find a job, the reason I tried so hard to avoid detection, the reason we... the reason *I* moved to Spearbreakers in search of a better life. But to be told she'd never existed; to find I couldn't even remember her name... I'd never felt so alone. Mr Frog's presence in the room made little difference. "Vanya," he said, and I looked him in the eyes, brushing the hair out of my face and tucking it behind my cursed ears. He seemed uncomfortable... something I'd never seen or even heard of him being. "Vanya," he repeated hesitantly, "it's all right. I've seen this happen before." He didn't seem to know how to react to my crying.

My gaze left his, dropping slowly to the floor. "My sister was real," I insisted weakly, but the fight had gone out of my voice.

"She's real in your mind," he corrected, "and that's all that need matter to you..."

I didn't want to discuss it anymore. I shook my head indelicately, wiping the tears from my eyes. "Let's just talk about something else."

"All right," he agreed, changing the subject. "Do you remember when you first saw your golden bracelet?"

I looked disdainfully at him. "My grandparents said I was two when I arrived at the mountainhome. What do *you* think?"

"Can I assume that you believe it was a gift from your original, elven parents?" he queried.

I sniffed and wiped a stray tear from my face. "No, my grandmother made it for me. She cared about us." The "us" slipped out - I'd meant my sister and I, but had forgotten.

"It wouldn't have stayed on your wrist when you were two. Do you remember when your grandparents gave it to you?"

I thought about it for a moment, but couldn't place the memory. It confused me.

"No," I said, shaking my head. "I can't even remember them saying anything about it."

The man sat, picking up his notebook again and writing something down.

"Interesting," he said, deep in thought.

"Mr Frog?" I asked hopelessly, looking up and searching his eyes, "Why can't I remember these things? Why can't I remember my sister, or my grandparents giving me my bracelet?"

He scratched his beard ponderingly. "I'm not entirely sure. It's possible your memories were altered."

"Have you ever forgotten anything like that, and can't remember it?"

He did a double take and looked at me curiously before responding. "I'm the one asking the questions. Not you."

Somehow I got the distinct feeling the answer was "yes". I asked another question anyway. "Do you still think I'm a spy?"

"Are you a spy?"

"No."

"Have you ever been a spy?"

"No."

"Are you on the side of Spearbreakers or something else?"

"Spearbreakers."

"Then I believe it. I'm a neurobiological chemist, and I designed what you consumed yesterday to render you incapable of speaking lies." With this said, he tucked his notebook and pencil away in his cloak. "I have enough information now, however. Thank you for your time, Vanya," he finished, as if I had any choice.

He walked over towards me, and injected something into my arm with one of his syringes. He did it so quickly I didn't even have time to tense my muscles at the slight pain. "To return your mind to normal," he explained, putting the empty device away and turning from me.

As he walked towards the portcullis door, I followed him with my eyes. "Mr Frog?" I asked quickly.

He paused, turning back in my direction. "Yes?"

"If you know I'm not a spy, can't I go free now?"

He turned away and began to work with something within his cloak, keeping it carefully out of my sight. "Terribly sorry, but no."

"But I pose no threat to the fortress!"

"Yes, you do. You know too much," he said with a brief glance in my direction.

I was incredulous. Somehow I'd gotten it into my head that I'd be released at the end of his visit. "And you can't just give me one of those amnesiacs Talvi took to make me forget everything?"

The portcullis raised, the lever outside seemingly pulling itself. Mr Frog stepped through and looked back at me through the bars as it lowered again. "I don't have the appropriate equipment," he said simply, and left.

I got off the little bed-shelf where I'd been sitting and stood, stretching my legs and walking to the door. I looked between the bars and watched as the cloaked figure walked out of sight, my last hope of salvation apparently gone. With a heavy sigh, I walked back and laid down on the bed. I picked up my journal, flipping through it absentmindedly as I puzzled over all that had happened.

Maybe Mr Frog had been right. Maybe I was wrong, and I'd never had a sister at all. Maybe I'd just imagined her to fill gaps in my memory. I had no idea how my own brain worked, anyway. But then, why was I so attached to someone who'd never existed? Why did I care so much about her? And the bracelet... if I'd only acquired it recently, and couldn't even remember how I'd gotten it, why was I so attached to it? Why did I want to keep it in my possession so badly? Mr Frog's visit raised more questions than it answered.

I put the journal down on the floor and turned towards the wall, wanting to sleep away my confusion. Whatever he'd injected into me was making me sleepy, anyway. As I slowly drifted from the waking world, a new question emerged: Why had someone altered my mind? Why had someone made me believe I'd had a sister? He'd implied that someone had knowingly changed my thoughts by using magic. Was I really that important?

The last question that lingered before it, too, faded away, was whether or not someone had altered Mr Frog's mind as well.



## SPLINT:

The Moghopper landed with a nasty clang on the landing dock in Ballpoint Tech's maintenance bays. Most of the contractors groggily filed out, but Ecem, On, and Bugi split off, heading into an unused storage room, On with a portable jumpgate on his back.

"You sure we should be doing this?" On asked sheepishly. "I'm a man of my word. I just need you and Bugi to keep the gate open." Ecem said while he locked the door as a precaution. "You sure he won't be a little, you know, trigger happy since we're from Ballpoint?" Bugi asked, loading her rifle. "It'll be fine. On, go the coordinates for that vent dialed in?" After a pause, On looked up from the holodisplay. We're green. Activating gate in 1...2...3.

The portal began as a strange red rip in the air, before growing to reveal a small dark vent. Ecem polarized his visor to hide his eyes and he stepped through, no weapons drawn.

He looked around, and saw nothing but what appeared to be recently triggered traps that hadn't been reset yet. He managed to worm his way under a vent and peeked



up, seeing Mr Frog holding what looked like a standard issue handgun from Ballpoint, though with what appeared to be a sawed-off crossbow stock and trigger mechanism. It looked like a crude mock up of a rail pistol more than a functional one though, some parts being held together with what appeared to be bailing wire and duct tape. Ecem took a deep breath before quietly managing to push the vent over enough. "What the hell do you want." Mr Frog said, not even looking up from the gun while he tried to solder something. "Well sir-"

Don't call me sir. I don't work for Ballpoint anymore, so you aren't subordinate to me." "Right, sorry." Ecem said scratching his neck. Talking was never a strong point for him, and since he needed to fight the urge to stay hidden, he wasn't faring any better than normal. "Anyway I've been told to give you this. Something about blueprints." He said, pulling out a shiny new PEA from his armor. Mr Frog looked up, holding the weapon by the trigger grip. He abruptly swung the weapon around, snatching the PEA from Ecem's hand and stating flatly "Back up." keeping the handgun trained on him. Ecem then noticed it had been loaded the entire time. He thumbed through the PEA, and lowered the weapon after a few tense minutes. "These are improvements on my chainweapons, a proper railgun schematic.... Who gave you this?" Mr Frog demanded, bringing the weapon back up.

"Well..... You did."

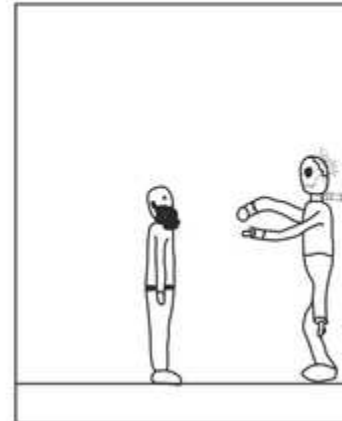
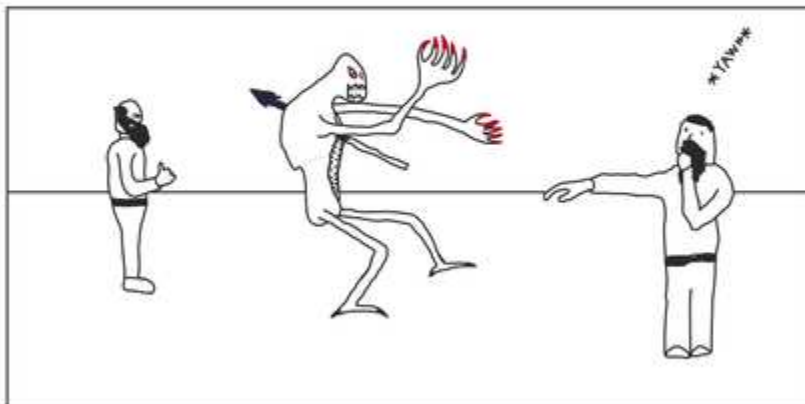
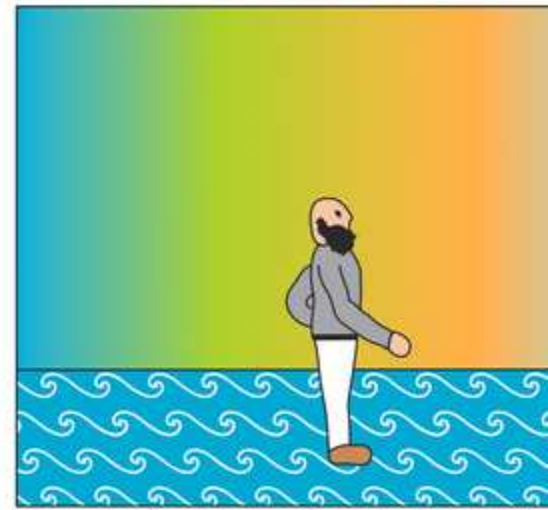
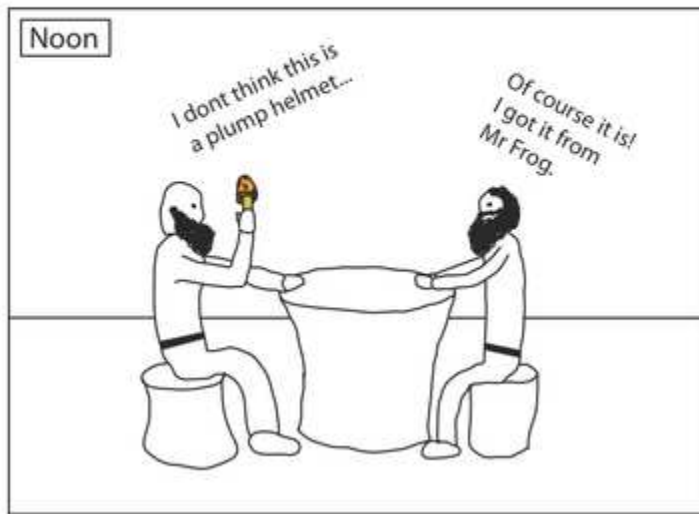
**(Hanslanda):** As far as I can tell, Splint's story is pretty much concurrent with 'normal' continuity, so Dorf!Frog!Future hasn't necessarily been undermining Joseph for very long at all.

**(Mr Frog):** But I thought... clones... buh..? I GIVE UP THIS PLACE MAKES NO SENSE WITH THE TIME TRAVEL OR MAYBE NO TIME TRAVEL AND THE CLONES AND THE CLONES AND THE TIME TRAVEL AND AND AND AAAHAHAHAUUGH

**Mr Frog has gone stark raving mad!**

## LLASRAM:

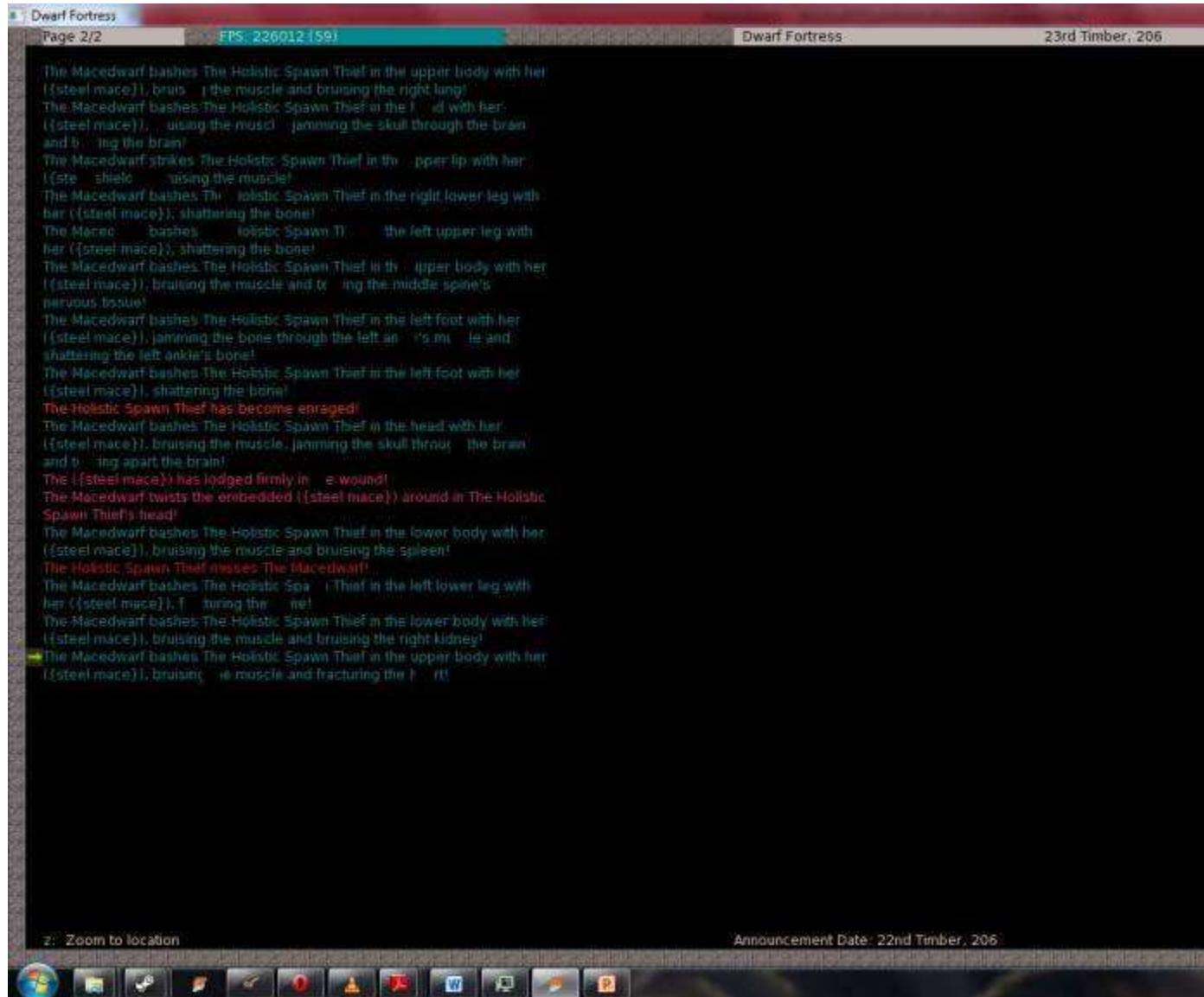
The second and last (for now) view of a day in Spearbreakers. I'm out of ideas and creativity, and all I know is the third will be filled with paranoia. I'm just going to be putting more small things in both.



## **PAINTBRUSHTURKEY:**

After all bets had been placed we spied a further 7 spawn that joined the fray beneath the tower, there was some disgruntlement about the unexpected reinforcements and some dwarves decided to give the goblins and zombies a hand as it were by firing their crossbows into the melee. It was not long until it became apparent that the weight of numbers of the undead would win the battle, the hidden necromancers kept raising their dead, even though the corpses were little more than bloody mush, yet every dismembered body part rose again with a life all of it's own and started clawing at every living thing possible even the fearsome spawn shrieked

in something approximating fright when they were torn limb from limb by the horde, their black hears eventually laid bare by the sheer weight of attacks, before being torn from their mutilated bodies. The battle lasted well over a month dampening the initial excitement and resulting in a routine of sorts setting in, however I insisted on a guard being maintained in all of the watchtowers.



The +menacing iron spike+ strikes The Elf Merchant in the lower body, tearing the muscle and tearing the guts through the ((rope-reed fiber cloak)))!

The Elf Merchant looks sick!

The menacing iron spike strikes The Elf Merchant in the left lower arm, fracturing the bone through the ((rope-reed fiber cloak)))!

An artery has been opened by the attack, a sensory nerve has been severed, a ligament has been torn and a tendon has been torn!

The +menacing iron spike+ strikes The Elf Merchant in the left upper arm, fracturing the bone and fracturing the left shoulder's bone through the ((rope-reed fiber cloak)))!

An artery has been opened by the attack and a tendon has been torn!

A ligament in the left shoulder has been torn and a tendon has been torn!

The +menacing iron spike+ strikes The Elf Merchant in the right lower leg, clipping the bone through the ((rope-reed fiber dress)))!

A ligament has been torn and a tendon has been torn!

The menacing iron spike strikes The Elf Merchant in the head, tearing the muscle, shattering the skull and tearing the brain through the ((rope-reed fiber hood)))!

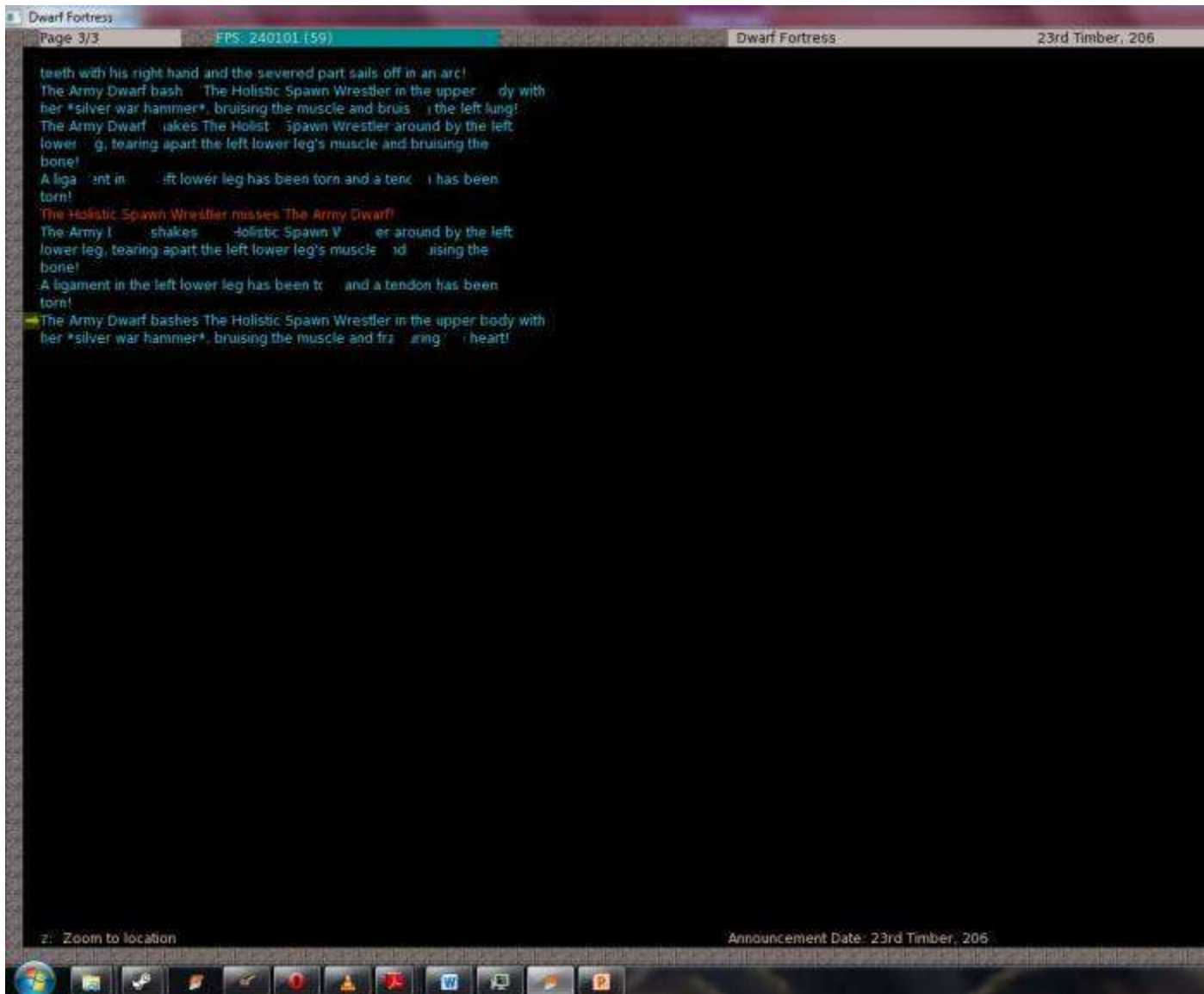
A tendon in the skull has been torn!

The Elf Merchant has been knocked unconscious!

z: Zoom to location

Announcement Date: 25th Felsite, 206





Hematite:

Mr Frog has just informed me that the Danger room has been completed, he said he "improved it", Upon inspection I could see no improvement, but alas I shall let the dwarf have his enthusiasms.

I shall take the danger room into operation today. All of our standing military squads will be required to have a training session.

It appears that the danger room is more dangerous than I had initially anticipated, I have heard reports of dwarves fainting and often breaking thumbs and toes, this is something I must investigate myself. I have scheduled myself to train with Sus III and Fisher today.

Upon beginning the session I noticed a foul smell emanating from the holes containing the spikes, there also appears to be some powdery discharge coming from the walls and ceiling of the room, Sus III got a blast to the stuff full in the face and immediately fainted, it was then that I noticed the room getting a bit blurry, so I

immediately took steps to suspend the operation of the room until the cause of this can be investigated, I only found the emergency shut off with fisher's help, who seemed strangely unaffected...

I have started questioning Mr Frog about his improvements and he told me that Hans had given him some mind and body enhancing substance to try out on us soldiers..... I have confronted Hans about this substance and he told me it was Fairy dust or some such nonsense. I believe he may need counseling.

Further investigation into the Sus III incident has revealed that he was wearing neither gauntlets nor boots whilst he was in the danger room, I have explained the matter to him, and he seems to understand now that the danger room is only to be used in full kit.

#### Galena

A Human caravan has come, I have ordered our soldiers to escort them in as there are still many undead outside the gate, the spawn seem to all have died off. I have also just been advised that the humans are being chased by approximately 30 mountain barbarians. I have ordered our entire military to assemble in the trade depot. It appears that we were to slow, our dwarves are still donning their armor, most of the humans are dead. The barbarians seem to have killed the vast majority of the undead, they seem to not be getting up, I hope the necromancer may have been killed, I have ordered the barbarians to be let in.... through the spike bridge.....it is with great sadness that I have to report that the mountain barbarian invaders (who have all died a range of deaths from being turned into kebab (SPIKES / FISHER) to being reduced to splatters in the pits to the left and right of our spike bridge (DODGED THE SPIKES AND LANDED ON THEIR HEADS OR SOME VARIATION THEREOF)

#### Limestone

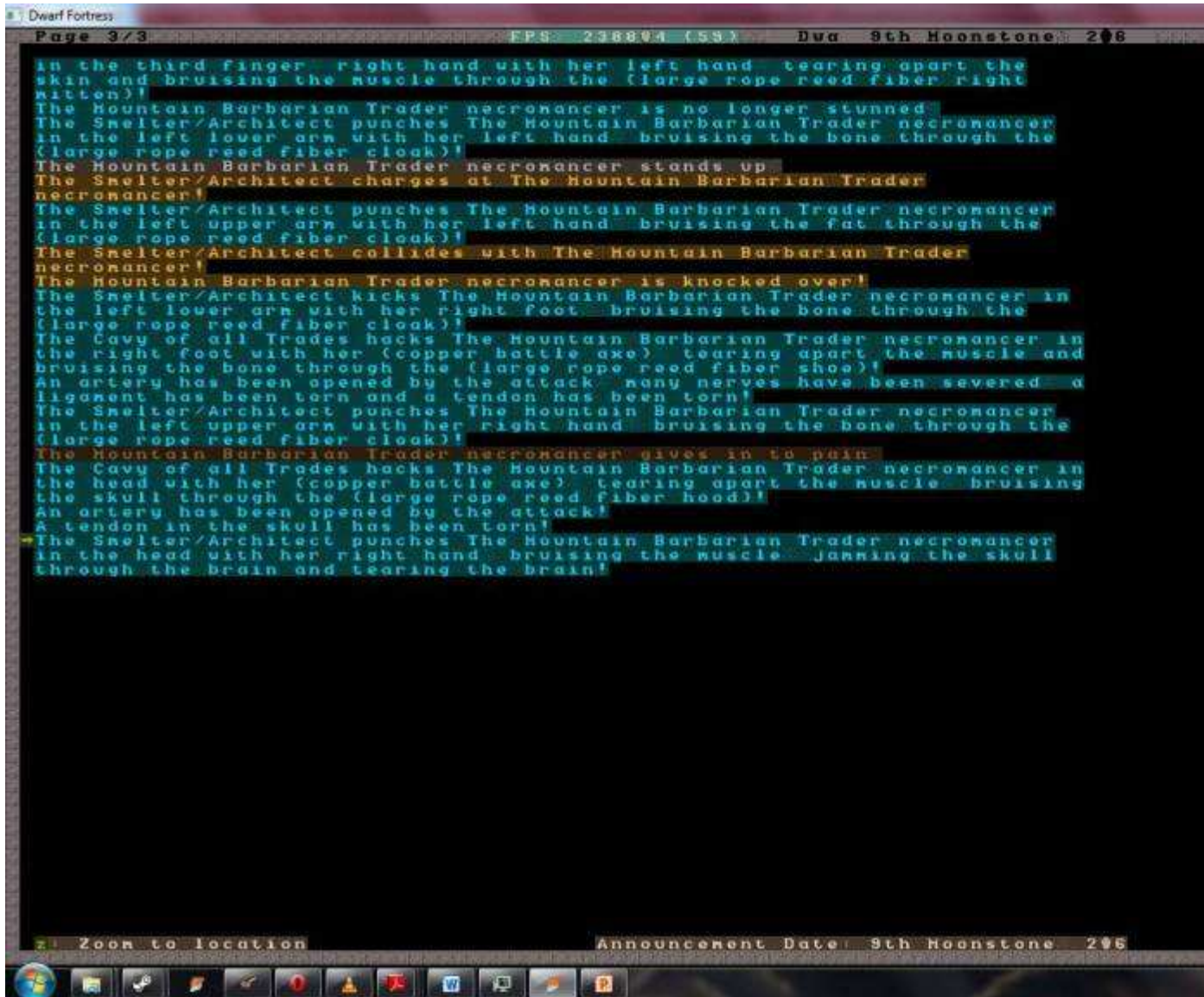
I have organized for more training in the now unimproved Danger room (no incidents since)and have set up the forges to produce addy suits of armor (legendary armorers only). Other than that the fortress is being cleaned up bit by bit and most of the corpses have been removed from the caravan depot.

#### Timber

This is it "The invisible walls" are going necromancer hunting, I would like the dwarves caravan to survive and perhaps even the outpost liaison....

Thus far the Necromancer hunt has proven unproductive, I have however identified a number of spawn hiding in the shrubbery just outside out fortress. They were killed without a single injury on our side. Whilst fighting the spawn we also found a necromancer who regrettably got away. However it appears that there is yet another as the dead are still restless





Opal:

There are only a few undead remaining on the map, I have opened the gates to the civilians, This has regrettably resulted in a few (minor injuries) we really need to find that necromancer before somebody dies. What happy coincidence one of our military dwarves went to investigate a sound in the bushes after he relieved himself.....

Damn there is another necromancer lurking around somewhere... sigh

Obsidian:

Ah well I shall put Ashsaber and Softa out of their misery, their endless howling is starting to get on my nerves, I've asked fisher to give me a hand, she doesn't seem to thrilled about the prospect and said something about them being old friends, but then came around and said that if it had to be done it would be best if a friend did it. I suppose the spawn have somehow gotten wind of my plans, we are under spawn siege and what a siege 31 mounted spawn wrestlers, everyone back inside the spike trap will have to handle this... I hope....

It seems I left the backdoor open, I have ordered everyone else back inside, looks like everyone else made it, too, but what do I spy with my little eye, looks like someone left a battleaxe out for everyone to take, I just have to have that, there are a couple of spawn and other things around, time to make a name for myself. Thankfully the spawn were mostly busy with the undead, except for one that I got my hands on, now they are running for their lives (Out of character: Crap I wanted to die a glorious and gory death here but alas it was not to be)

Shit that still needs to be done:

Finish the two guard towers outside the depot

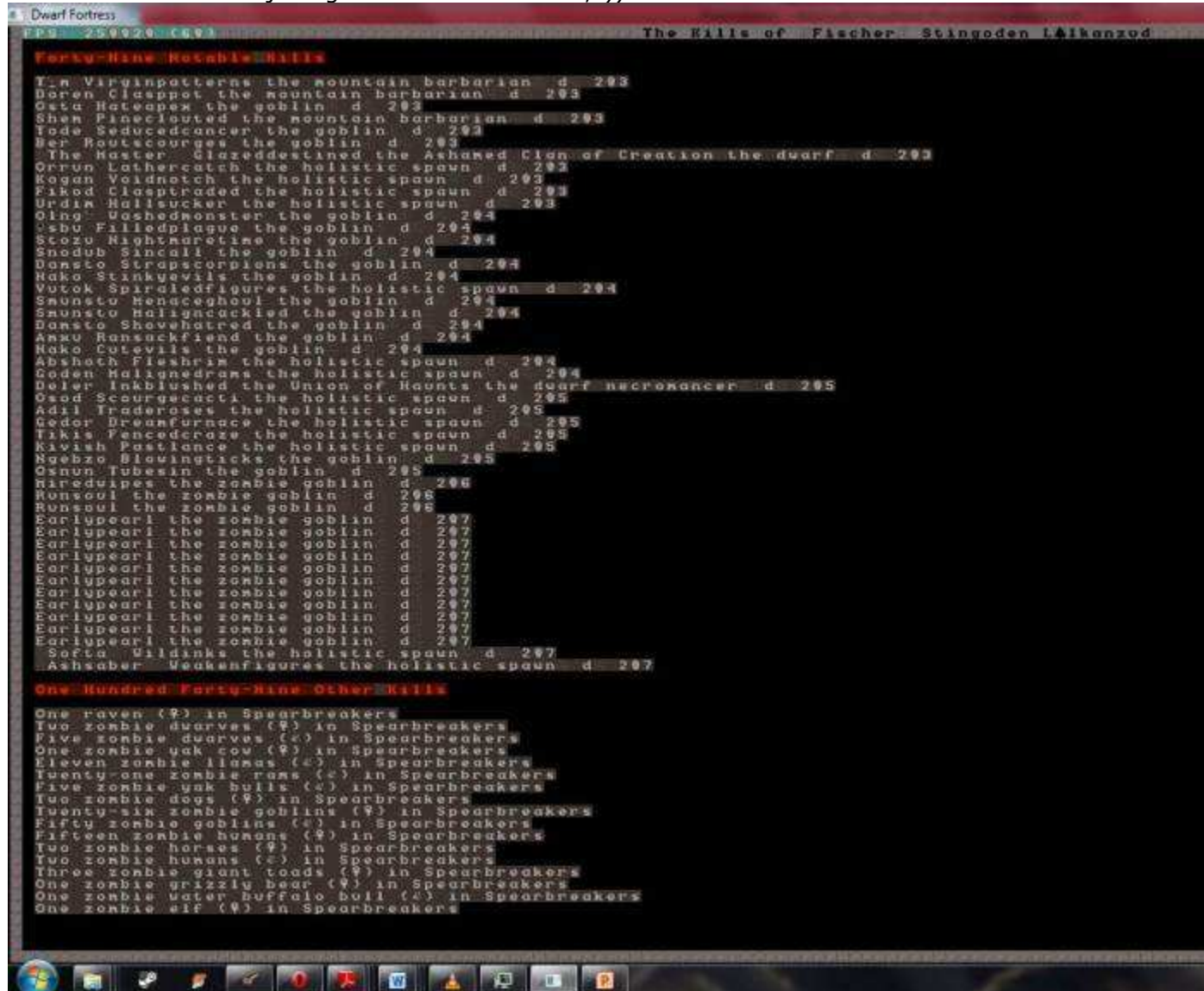
Also finish building and linking the flood gates at the ieds and then unsuspend the construction of the fortifications

kill the last necromancer who occasionally raises a swarm of dead, the dead are easily kept down by stationing one of the military dwarves outside the caravan path entrance (civilian dwarves can then roam and do whatever surface work they fancy)

Splint I reckon you will have a breeze of a turn and if you manage to loose more than 2 dwarves THERE WILL BE TROUBLE ;-)



**(PaintbrushTurkey):** JUST FOR THE RECORD (just took that now so it has Ashsaber and Softa on it but.... just ignore all the 207 kills ;-))



## MR FROG:

### Journal of Mr Frog

Entry #3501

This is unfortunate... the prototype escaped. No matter; as it seemingly managed to escape into the caverns through one of my concealed emergency escape hatches (unsure about the significance of this -- is it more intelligent than I thought?), I've passed it off as a Forgotten Beast. All the data's on file, so I should be able to create another without much trouble.

Perhaps the next one will have skin.

## SPLINT:

a WIP of a spawnitis'd dwarven soldier.



**(Mr Frog):** The helmet's a bit wonky, and the anatomy of the shoulders is a little jerky, but I like the line weighting.

**(Mitchewawa):** I like the wonkiness, it makes the Spawn seem a little bit stranger and ill-fitting.

**(Mr Frog):** I actually had that exact thought about the helmet something like ten seconds after posting that comment :V Still, there is something very wrong with Ash's clavicles.

**(Splint):** So what if a few things are out of place. Overall he's not really going to follow total normalcy in the biology department, not anymore at least.

**(Mr Frog):** Also... clavicles attach at the sternum. They won't work anywhere else. The grotesque face is nicely-executed, but the shoulders kind of push it too far -- I just don't buy it. Actually, it's starting to look like his neck's at an angle and he just has really huge neck/back muscles (what the hell are those things called again? Trappy-something?). His arms are attached at the same height, at least.

**(Hanslanda):** Trapectius, apparently. Google is better than magic.

**(Mr Frog):** See, we're not just a circlejerk of slightly-unhinged nerds writing fanfic about an RP of a computer game. We're *educational*, dammit.

## MR FROG:

### A Very Special Delivery

Mr Frog paced around his new workplace, sipping from his flask. Several display screens were set into a wall above a counter covered in tools; on the opposite wall was a door leading to the floor's main hallway. To the left was another door leading to a hallway with containment cells. A large workbench, big enough for two people and a dog to lie on it comfortably, sat in the center of the room. Bright lights shone from the ceiling, shining off of the sterile white linoleum tile floor.

Mr Frog was thinking. Achieving his goal seemed like it was going to be far more difficult than he had thought -- though, of course, it was far from impossible, especially for a genius of his caliber. Getting to Joseph was going to be tricky, and even then, dealing with that madman would only be the first step. There were still his underlings and devotees; Joseph's ideals would outlive him no matter what happened to their progenitor. Still, first things first.

The primary problem at the moment was the sheer level of surveillance -- from what Mr Frog had seen on the brief tour Silena had lead him on (not terribly extensive, just important daily facilities such as the lunchroom and bathrooms) every single nook and cranny of this installation had a camera trained on it at all times -- even, to Mr Frog's mild consternation, the bathrooms and showers. If Mr Frog (or anyone else, for that matter) did anything that they weren't supposed to be doing, someone would notice immediately. It was clear to Mr Frog that further machinations would be pointless until he resolved that problem.

Mr Frog swirled the fluid around in his flask, examining the situation from every angle, trying to come up with a solution.

Silena was a possibility. While she admittedly seemed to be devoted to Joseph's cause beyond the slightest chance of conversion, she also, in Mr Frog's eyes, had the highly-useful trait of being an idiot. Not a particularly-useful idiot, admittedly, but she did appear to be one tool that was within Mr Frog's grasp at the moment.

Mr Frog continued contemplating his options for a moment, his brow creasing, before giving up. He didn't have enough information to go on. He supposed Silena may be useful in that respect, at least; he wouldn't trust that babbling moron to keep quiet about anything. If she knew anything useful, he'd find out soon enough.

Mr Frog heard footsteps behind him; he turned around, and he saw Silena walking

into the room.

"The test specimens have arrived," she chimed merrily, as annoying as ever; "You'll be able to get to work right after they're secured."

Mr Frog nodded, trying his best to appear pleased with the prospect of taking the most horrific biological weapon ever created by man or demon and making them even more deadly. What actually appeared on his face was more of a twisted grimace.

Silena looked at his expression, bemused. "You okay in there?" she asked lightly.

Mr Frog blinked, then shook his head. "Yes, I'm fine," he said snappishly. Silena tilted her head, her placidly-puzzled expression not changing.

Mr Frog decided that now would be as good a time as ever to try to wrangle some information out of her. He didn't like working with people much; they were too complex to easily be put to use.

"How long have you been working here, Silena?" he asked, trying and failing to sound pleasant.

Silena's face went blank for a moment, then recomposed itself into her usual complacent smile. "I've been working with Eris as a bioengineer for about three years now," she said; "I was only transferred to this facility a few months ago, however."

Mr Frog nodded, forcing a smile. Of course she wouldn't have been here long enough to learn anything interesting; that would make her worth talking to. Still, she likely knew more than he did.

"I'd like to know more about how this facility functions. How is it managed?" asked Mr Frog; "How does it sustain itself?"

Silena nodded, smiling brightly now. "We get weekly shipments of food and drink from willing suppliers wishing to further the cause -- Joseph does the negotiations, so we get it at a discount," she bubbled; her eyes sparkled as she mentioned Joseph's name. Mr Frog nodded, now paying full attention. Supply lines. A vulnerable point that could be exploited.

"Our waste is handled by automated droids," continued Silena; "I'm sure you've seen them milling around. Aren't they cute? I'm thinking of getting someone to fix up one of the junked ones and keeping it as a pet."

Mr Frog decided that this particular train wasn't going anywhere he needed to be. "What about management?" he asked, trying to get back on the rails; "Who gives the orders?"

Silena beamed; Mr Frog had a fairly good idea as to what she was going to say next. "Why, Joseph, of course," she said, not at all to his surprise; "There's not much in the way of middle management, save for clerical work. We're free to work as we please, but Joseph's wishes come first." Silena stared off into space dreamily.

Mr Frog shook his head disapprovingly. Silena's expression reminded Mr Frog briefly of Talvieno; he half-wondered if this woman secretly thought that she was some sort of rodent as well. "What if something goes wrong?" he asked, picking a different track; "What sort of failsafes are in place?"

Silena nodded, still smiling. "Well, for starters, we have cameras in every room --" she motioned towards one on the ceiling "-- and a dedicated surveillance crew." Mr Frog took note of this; human components in a system were easy to sabotage. Silena walked over to the door she had come in through and tapped on it; it was painted white, but the tone indicated solid metal. "In the event of a containment breach, any of the doors in the facility can be remotely sealed off," Silena said. She winked at Mr Frog cheerfully; "Nothing bad gets out of here unless we want it to."

"What about Joseph?" asked Mr Frog; "Where is he?"

A curious expression came over Silena's face momentarily. "Nobody knows," she said, staring at Mr Frog intently, "and nobody who finds out gets the chance to

spread it around." She tilted her head; "Why do you want to know?"

Mr Frog flinched. Did Silena suspect something? No. Of course not. She was an idiot. "I'm interested in the workings of this organization," he said bluntly. After a few moments, Silena nodded, not saying anything more. Mr Frog heard a familiar screeching coming from outside the room, along with a horrifying scraping noise, like stone grinding against metal. Silena looked at the door, her ever-present smile dissolving into an expression of pure fear, a sight which filled Mr Frog with perverse glee.

A short time later, the door to the room opened; two heavily-armed men about Mr Frog's size came through it, followed by several large, brightly-coloured, vaguely-equine creatures hauling multiple loudly-screaming metal boxes. Mr Frog was very sure what the boxes contained -- the Detective's Children, further-refined. HS-2. Silena stared at the boxes slack-jawed. She'd never seen an HS-2, but she never wanted to |hear| one ever again.

Mr Frog looked at one of the men. "The containment cells are through that door," he said, gesturing towards the relevant doorway; "I'll lead the way."

The man shook his head. "I'm just a guard," he said; he pointed towards the bright green horse-creature behind him, which looked at Mr Frog with large, unmistakably-intelligent eyes. Mr Frog realized, to his embarrassment, that the creature was not a pack animal, but rather a widely-known sapient species: *Equus sapiens terrestrius* -- earth pony. His time in Spearbreakers had dulled his wits.

Mr Frog nodded at the pony, who puffed derisively. He led them out of the room towards the containment cells.

After the group had already unloaded most of the boxes, a pair of hauling ponies exited a containment cell, after which the door sealed behind them. Mr Frog nodded, and the green pony held up a remote control device with his forehoof (Mr Frog wasn't sure how the ponies managed this; he would love to dissect one sometime) and pressed a button with his muzzle. Just as with the other boxes, the group watched on the display screen above the door as the box automatically opened.

Mr Frog's guts tied into a knot as an unconscious dwarf tumbled onto the floor. He heard Silena gasp in horror behind him.

They had captured live dwarven test subjects. It was just like it had been at Ballpoint.

"Has there been a mistake?" said the green pony, a very faint quaver in his voice.

Mr Frog tore his attention away from the screen. He shook his head, too numb to say anything.

The green pony nodded, suddenly visibly-wary. He'd been wondering why some of the boxes had been silent the whole way here, and was deeply-disturbed that this was apparently exactly what they had requested. He wondered what they could possibly want with the dwarf. He wondered who the dwarf was. He wondered who the other dwarves they likely were carrying were.

"This is sick!" shouted a blue pony; "That's a person in there!" One of the guards glanced over at him momentarily, and the green pony flinched. The blue pony was quite literally doomed. Shame, too; he had been such a good worker.

Mr Frog looked at the green pony thoughtfully. If the pony's loyalty had been shaken, he was a potential tool. "Problems?" he asked quietly.

The green pony shook his head, looking at the little man apprehensively. This was a test, he decided, and he had a hunch what the punishment would be if he failed.

"No," he said gruffly.

Mr Frog nodded, taking note of the pony's physical appearance. Bright green, deep-green mane, blue eyes, a bit shorter than Silena at the shoulders, short muzzle, narrow jaw, and what appeared to be a tattoo of a wheelbarrow on his flank.

If the pony came back, Mr Frog would be waiting.

The group proceeded to unload the rest of their cargo.

Some time afterwards, the green pony was leading the rest of his group back through the entrance hall when he heard a single gunshot behind him. He knew from experience what it had been. The blue pony, the one who had gotten angry earlier, was now dead. Eris didn't tolerate dissenters; they were a liability.

The green pony continued trotting straight on through the hall, not looking back. He didn't want to see. nor did he need to. He'd already seen it enough times.

[[Talvieno's note: Following this there was a miniature pony derail. (no pun intended.)]]

**(Hanslanda):** First that tinychat clusterfuck of insanity, and now this... My god. It's spreading like wildfire. 🤔

**(Mr Frog):** Aww crap, was I supposed to follow the link Splint PM'd me? 🤔 I don't know why, my brain just didn't make the connection between 'guy sends me link' and 'guy wants me to click through link' :V

**(Hanslanda):** That would only be logical, but this is Spearbreakers, where logic dictates you must add a mug to all equations.

## SPLINT:

It was a time of great celebration throughout the fortress. Thanks to a crude "simulation system" as Mr Frog called it, the undead had been destroyed, after nearly two years of endless horror from them. Paintbrushturkey, being a military dwarf himself and the overseer of the time, had OK'd the system, if only because he hoped it'll improve his comrades-in-arms' reaction times if nothing else. He sent the population on sweeps of the countryside, and had Fischer personally kill those responsible for so much horror. This was the first time in years that Spearbreakers had some many dwarves gathered in the central dining hall. Everyone was there, and even skulkers came out to join the festivities, not needing to worry about being judged or ignored. Spearbreakers was safe at last, and all deserved to celebrate.

Splint stepped up onto a table as Fischer and Draigean shouted, as Fischer said it "YOU LOT OUTTA SHUT THE FUCK UP BEFORE I RIP YA VOICE BOXES OUT!!" The crowd complied. Nobody was really sure if Fischer was a dwarf or dwarfette because of the colonel's build and intimidating voice, and nobody wanted to find out if the fearsome pikedwarf's threat would be acted upon. "We have a few dwarves to thank for this. After weeks of bloodshed and terror, we have done a great service, not only to ourselves, but to the world." Splint said proudly, his usual distant demeanor having been replaced by a sort of glow nobody ever remembered him having. "First and foremost, are the soldiers. We came here to build an army, and so far it has proved itself well. Second, is Mr Frog, the one who designed the combat simulator, and Paintbrush for allowing it to be used, in spite of the fact it could have killed some

of our fighting dwarves." He grabbed a mug off the table and chugged it down. "I may not be the monarch, but in destroying not only an army of undead but their puppeteers as well, I believe we are within our right to declare this day, [insert date here], A national holiday!" The crowd of dwarves let out a cheer, the soldiers adding to the noise by banging their weapons against their shields. "And Paintbrush, if you'll let me, I'd like to give our fighters the month off to recuperate! You've earned it!" A further, louder cheer came from the crowd. Ordinarily the army drilled nonstop.

"Thank ye sir, but I'll be keepin' my dwarves on duty. We'll still have those damned thieves and snatchers running about, and I'd like to keep my pike good and lubed up." Fischer said, standing at attention. "A warrior through and through! I knew I was right to hire you years ago Colonel!" The crowd cheered once more for Fischer. That dwarf may have been the most frightening in the fortress, but turning down a vacation was truly admirable. Some dwarves were even thankful.

"I don't see why not. Like you said, they've earned it." Paintbrush said in agreement. "Then it's settled. And to kick off the celebrations..."

-Splint Lokumeshesh has organized a party in the dining hall.-

"Bust open the barrels! Food and drink for all! Even you skulkers I see out there!" The crowd cheered. It was easily one of the happiest moments in the fortress' entire short history. The undead were destroyed, the army given time off, and best of all, the entire stock was opened to all. This would definitely be a night to remember.

[[Talvieno's note: This is a derail that menaces with spikes of *long*. Also Paintbrushturkey's final update, but that was posted earlier in this doc. Things become increasingly confusing again around this point, and I'm rearranging a lot of story posts.]]

**(Xahnel):** Know what would be a cool weapon for Spearbreakers II, if the Spawn is included? Spawnbone Scythes.

**(Talvieno):** I'm all for scythes. I have a thing for them, honestly (hence **Scythods**). It's something I'd like to see in Spearbreakers the Sequel. Dwarves should also be able to make soap, walls and chairs from their enemies. I still have those mods! 😊

**(Xahnel):** So, the spawn scythe... What special thing should it have? Maybe a chance to cause fear in the enemy?

**(Splint):** We'd need an interaction for that. Otherwise it'd largely be a flavor deal.

**(Xahnel):** I'd say weapons made of spawn would have to do something... Besides killing, anyways.

**(Splint):** Story wise I'd say seeing dwarves using their enemies as melee weapons would be absolutely terrifying.

**(Xahnel):** This is gonna be so fun...

**(Talvieno):** I think I kind of like the idea of a spawnbone scythe blade at the end of a chain. Bones and chains are a particularly good theme if you want macabre, and you could add spawn teeth all up and down the chain... But that's more approaching visual art and less actual modding. I'd call it a chainscythe... with not quite the same idea behind the name as a chainsword. It would have the cutting power of a sword, combined with the fast action of a whip (and a separate attack for the teeth attached to the chain), making it pretty freaking lethal. Very far from just a flavor deal. Story wise, as Splint said, if I came across a dwarf wielding one of those, I'd run for my life.

**(Xahnel):** ^ that is an awesome idea. Also, thank you~ If we develop it here, we can allow for the technological progression to this new awesomeness in SB2

**(Reudh):** @Talvieno: Why not a nunchukan style scythe? Two shortened scythe/sickle blades on the end of a chain.

**(Mr Frog):** I think it's technically-possible to make Spawn vulnerable to weapons made of their own bones... I'm not telling how, though.

**(Splint):** This is a war that changed how dwarves were... We couldn't remain the same otherwise we would have fallen... We'll do what we must to survive. Adapt or die.

It is the only way.

[[Talvieno's note: This is only a tiny snip of it. Derailing is a favorite Spearbreakers pastime.]]

## SPLINT:

I can go on and will, for shits and giggles. I have a recording obligation today, so I'm saving. My non-story update is that Paintbrush is still fighting a horse head, a Barbarian spearmaster is the only survivor of the failed barbarian attack, and a spawn is running around somewhere. I've also suspended the euthanization order. Those two are just too ingrained in the fortress culture to really be gotten rid of.

Mk I "Mastodon" Siege Breaker Assault Platform  
Crew 1 driver/gunner (primary weapons and locomotion)  
1 communications officer/tank commander  
28 supplementary technicians and weapons operators.

### Weapons

2 100 cm Magnetic Accelerator Cannons/Siege guns  
4 "Dragon's Wrath" cruise missiles  
2 "Havoc" nuclear missiles  
8 separate twinlinked 50. caliber machinegun sponson mounts  
pintle mounted quadlinked 50. caliber machine gun w/ 360 degree rotation  
2 chassis mounted 20mm electric rotary cannons  
2 missile pods laden with aforementioned warheads



Electrified hull to repel borders

Power Plant

1 Ballpoint Technology microfusion reactor (this is intended to be and marketed as a lesser power source for a small city.)

4 Stone INC solid fuel combustion drives for auxiliary power while firing weapons

Use

Short range (80 miles when using solid fuel) heavy assault/fire support platform and protected nuclear ordinance delivery system

[[Talvieno's note: Rederailed into awesomeness of what could be if dwarves had tanks. Also a city Splint came up with called Sewaturet, and a *second* timewar. As Splint said: "I have a whole bunch of universes, some of them more bullshit than the last - creepy smile -"]]

[[Talvieno's note: And this is where the denizens of the thread explain and support their actions, following Mr Frog getting onto everybody for the Derail of Doom.]]

**(Splint):** That's our fault, but hey, All I'm doing is clean up of the zombie apocalypse right now so there isn't a whole lot for me to report on. gotta kill time somehow.

**(Xahnel):** I'll try to post more Spearbreakers related stuffs, then, and slow down my posting in general.

**(Mr Frog):** It's honestly pretty harmless in this case, despite my bitching. If we didn't have Talvieno organizing the important posts, I'd be a lot more aggressive about keeping the thread uncluttered. Can't say I envy Talvi, though.

**(Hanslanda):** Yeah, we're keeping the thread active. But we don't want to reach that tipping point where it stops being about Spearbreakers and starts being about people posting about stuff in the Spearbreakers thread.

**(Xahnel):** Still, I'll do my best to minimize my random rambling, and tiny posts. Though I will not refrain from a situationally required hilarious (to me) bond one liner.

**(Splint):** To be fair, most of what we've discussed is related in some fashion to Spearbreakers or the narrative surrounding it. Just nothing constructive.

[[Talvieno's note: And this last line is why I included the derails in the first place. Spearbreakers' sequel must include many of these ridiculously insane ideas, if it's ever created. Also, many of these ideas work their way into the canon.]]

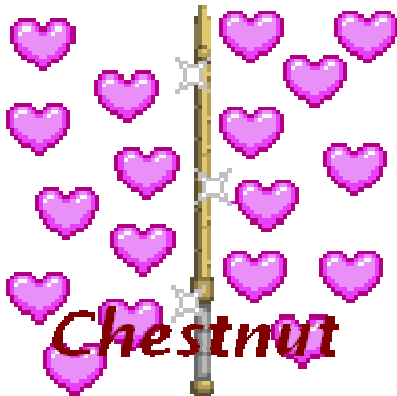
**(Talvieno):** The Spearbreakers thread closely resembles the Spearbreakers fortress: everyone doing their own thing, nothing getting done, everything is in chaos and it's up to one poor sod to figure out how to wrestle it into something resembling order.

**(Splint):** Without any undead around though the next migrants might actually make it in without any ridiculous strategy needed on my end.

**(Hanslanda):** Lol, gotta love it when 'hey migrants made it in' isn't a common occurrence, and in fact is a tremendous accomplishment achieved with blood, sweat and war.

## XAHNEL:

[[Talvieno's note: This is a picture of Chestnut, The Master's beloved wooden pike. It menaces with spikes of sweet, sweet love.]]



## **SPLINT:**

*-This is a cat leather bound journal. All crafts dwarfship is of mediocre quality at best. It is bordered with bands of slate and studded with slate. On the front cover is the name "Splint Lokumeshesh" in slate. On the front cover is an image of crossed pikes behind a shield in slate. On the back cover is an image of an elephant in elephant ivory. The elephant is depicted in a pool of liquid and screaming. The elephant is melting. It shows signs of wear and now has an iron chain attached to the spine, likely to be carried over the shoulder. The chain appears to be slightly rusted.*

### **1st Granite, year 207. Second term of office as overseer of Lokumokab, Spearbreakers.**

It's been some time since I picked you up journal. Too long a time in fact. Paintbrush asked me if I'd like to take over, since the trials of battle are beginning to wear him down. I agreed, if only to correct my many mistakes in the past. I've decided that, in light of how many skulkers turned out at the main celebration, to dig a barracks for them as a gesture of good will.

We also have a single Holistic Warrior perched in our grounds and have dispatched a soldier named Awl to dispose of it. I'm confident he will take care of it, as he earned a title for himself in the battles here amongst his fellow pikedwarves.

### **3rd Granite, 207.**

With his victory this morning, Awl raised his sky blue pike high in the air and proclaimed himself Awl Steelcrazy, The Warm Bastion of Gullies, a master of the pike!

**'Awl' Delerdîbesh Sirabbërûl Degël has become a Pikemaster.**

[When he struck down the wrestler it stated he became a pikemaster. Badass timing. His name was Sigun at the time. Just wanted him to have a different name, so based it on the Awl Pike.]

### **12th Granite, 207.**

Clean up is still slow going and Codyorr said he saw a hand running around up on the hill much of the fortress was built into. I have dispatched Fischer to investigate, and kill the cocksucker responsible.

### **15th Granite, 207.**

Cleanup is still slow going, and that bastard is still roaming around. The original entrance has been finished and rehooded to its old lever in what used to be the furnishings workbay. Speaking of which, I seem to be the only one willing to risk lives to save on space. While I care for everyone here deeply, I don't want us using more material than is needed to get things done.

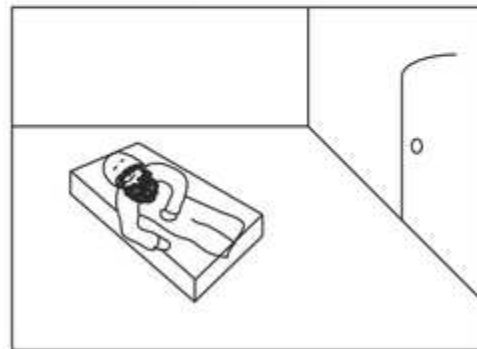
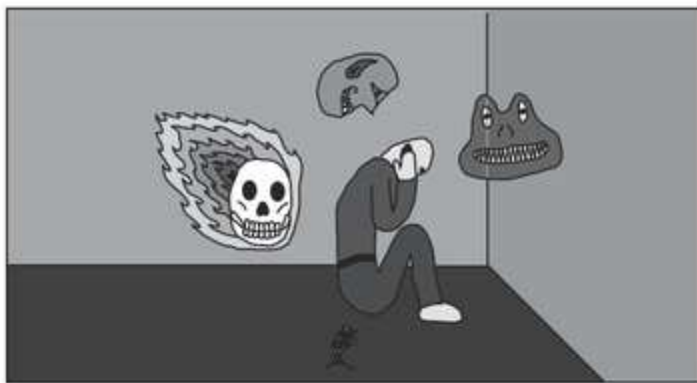
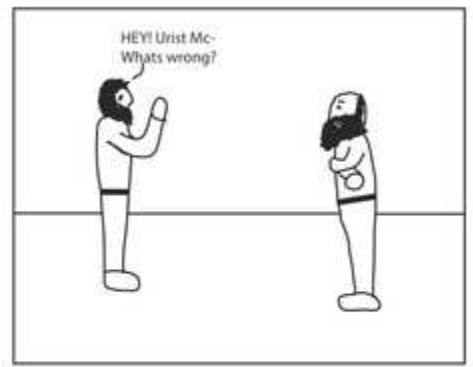
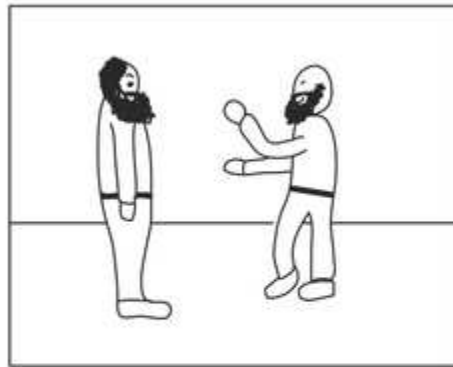
Also a few undead are blundering about, and nobody seems to really care anymore, simply going about cleaning up the mess and more or less just kind of pushing them aside and going about their day. I've deployed 1st and 2nd Squads in a pattern to funnel the bastard, because he has to be somewhere he can see the bodies he's reanimating. Hopefully he'll be dead soon enough. I've also issued orders to SolPyre to dig out a new cage storage, and for a barracks to be dug into the space next to the depot. I've also issued an order to begin making more mugs and a few hundred blocks so we can begin constructing a proper fortress to house the army.

On that note, and true to my word, I have given the military extended leave, so they may recover from this ordeal, and to assist in cleaning up the mess, save for Colonel Fischer's platoon.

On a personal note.... I know it's wrong but I've requested my rooms be finished. Mr Frog said he saw plenty of spare furniture, so I've opted to bring it in myself once the floors are finished.

## **LLASRAM:**

the third and final panel is finally done. The only tasks left are to add tons of mugs to all of them



He is in a hyper-paranoid state where everyday objects he sees are hallucinated into things that are mocking him. The torch turns into the skull, the elf ear into an elf, and the random bone on the floor into an entire hand trying to kill him.

**(Paintbrushturkey):** hey splint can you sign me up for another turn?  
also could I request being put in charge of a squad of dwarves (military not the civilian squads) whenever the opportunity presents itself?

Also to make it clear

# SUS II IS STILL ALIVE

[[Talvieno's note: At this point, we finally, finally got the idea. But Aseaheru was still wrongly believed to be dead by the majority of the forumites.]]

**(Splint):** OOC Update: That fucker is really starting to piss me off, if only because I have to micromanage the soldiers' movements more than usual. When the hunting parties showed up he mass resurrected a number of bodies, so I have an idea of where he is. But the axelords need enough time to move unto the hill to push him into Fischer's squad, and the zombies aren't allowing that because they absolutely *have* to attack them.

**(Mr Frog):** This is what I was worried about... necros are hard to catch in an open area.

Are there any convenient dead ends anywhere for you to corral him into? If not, we may need to break out the necrotrap.

**(Splint):** I have to keep Fischer and her men on permanent zombie killing detail, not that it seems the civvies actually care anymore. Literally, they're just walking right by the undead and not even paying them any mind. Until all of the corpses have been cleaned up I can't do anything about it. And one of the ones that got run off appears to have come back, and a Mountain barbarian officer is trapped in the spike walk's loop-o-death stairwell under a hatch that's been locked.

I know the general area he's in, but unfortunately the AI is working against me, as I need the soldiers spread out and they tend to move as a cluster, giving the necros ample escape time/room. They're hanging out around the wagon tunnel; that much I know. If I can get the mess cleaned up, I'm going to rout them into the old garbage dump and trap them there. Fischer will be able to deal with it from there.

**(Hanslanda):** For some reason, this strikes me as badass. We're actually being forced to work to kill something. Its not a usual DF instawin-lose battle, its some RTS shit at this point.

**(Splint):** I know right? It's a pain in the ass though. I wish I had runesmith. This is the one time I would cheat to get rid of them, if only to bring the little fuckwits out of hiding.

**(Hanslanda):** Patience, Splint. Patience. Soon the Necromancer will make a mistake, and when he does, its all over. One mistake is all it takes with Fischer roaming around.

## BUKITODINOS:

### **Bukit's Meeting with Splint**

"water...Booze...anything" he pleaded.

As they brought him in with some strawberry wine, he explained his encounter with he spawn in the current overseer's office. Splint was his name.

"They ambushed us only at night, When we were tending to the children. And our wounds.."

"has anyone been... bitten?" Splint replied.

"No, they usually die before they get bitten, but were well aware of what happens to the bitten." \*Bukit shudders\* "I witnessed the transformation first hand I tell ya."

"Can you... tell me what happens?"

"Well....he stretches out first getting to the height of six dwarfs, then his fingernails grow and harden. His teeth sharpen, And his eyes lose all soul they once had, pure white or black... then, you know the rest..."

\*Splint shudders\*

"I would rather leave now..."

"G-Go, take this..."

\*Splint hands Bukit a gold mug\*

\*Bukit leaves\*

## BUKITODINOS:

For Spearbreakers we fight, for Spearbreakers we die.

We brandish our pikes, axes, and bows.

For the spawn at the gates we do not fear!

Through goblins, Spawn, zombies, and necros. We persevere and fight.

We are brothers and sisters in arms.

And die by the sword we shall.

When other forts say "FOR THE FORTRESS"

Spearbreakers says "FOR THE MUGS"

Large they may be, strong they may be.

But when this fort falls,

THEY FALL WITH US!

So, brothers and sisters in arms.

Brandish your weapons!

AND FIGHT!

FOR SPEARBREAKERS!

**(Splint):** Just to get everyone's attention, I NEED to mention this: He finally slipped up. He tried to sneak in through the garden site and got beaten to death by to workers.

The undead threat has finally passed!

**(Hanslanda):** Hehe, nice. All that military positioning and preparedness, and the douche gets clobbered by masons.

**(Splint):** reservists actually. He got pincushioned by three dorfs: Askad, Bloodeyes, and Terrahex. Oh and Talvi is now a master armorer.

[[Talvieno's note: Later...]]

**(Paintbrushturkey):** are you sure you got the last necro? I had that feeling 2x only to find another necro showed up...

**(Splint):** Yeah, I'm taking a breather and drawing right now, but there's another. I thought the other got bored and left, but sadly not the case.

**(Jack Magnus):** *more* necromancers?  
I'd like to say I'm surprised, but I'm really not.  
Wonder how long it'll take to find this one >.>

**(Splint):** The other one did something stupid, so the other probably will too.

**(Paintbrushturkey):** yeah the fortress was shut down for pretty much a year, so if we are really unlucky there will be something like 10 necros on the map.... they do tend to get found by "civilians " hauling bodyparts away, so i'm sure we'll find the rest of the suckers soon enough, did we get another book yet (if you check one of the ones I killed dropped a book)?

also, thee are actually no more civilians in the fort, they all got about their business wearing armor, carrying at least 1 weapon and a shield, or at the very least should do so.... it's the main reason for not having had any casualties during my turn.

**(Hanslanda):** Spearbreakers: Where every dwarf is a soldier, and no soldier ever dies to the enemy.\*

\*Warning: Hospital may cause side effects such as heavy bleeding, faintness, decapitation and death. If you have died while attending Spearbreakers Hospital, call 1555DWARF, you may have a case.

## TALVIENO:

### **Before:**

Armok finds it sadistically humorous to make The Master lose his mind and go berserk as he attempts to perfect a jade spearhead.

### **Late Mitch's Reign:**

1. Mr Frog gets PEA #2 back from Talvi, Talvi knocked unconscious and winds up in Spearbreakers hospital
2. Ballpoint/Parasol battle outside Spearbreakers
  - 2b. Urist arrives at Spearbreakers
3. <Urist's and Vanya's earlier adventures>
  - 3b. Urist receives Spearbreakers gear, including a pike/spear with the jade spearhead The Master created.
  - 3c. Splint and Mr Frog discuss backup plan to kill Talvi, Hans is sent to dig a collapsing-hallway trap.
4. Vanya and Talvi fight Mr Frog

4b. Urist saves the fortress from demons and a mysterious unnamed figure, breaks his spear but keeps the spearhead The Master made, as Armok has blessed it.

4c. Mr Frog rendered unconscious due to being tired from Vanya/Talvi battle.

4d. Vanya imprisoned.

#### **Early/Mid Paintbrush Turkey's Reign:**

1. More Parasol/Ballpoint wars, as told by Splint.

1b. Mr Frog goes to Eris, meets Perky Receptionist, is cloned. Original Mr Frog stays at Eris, clone is sent to Spearbreakers with altered memory.

1c. Vanya is still in prison.

1d. (Urist's activities unknown)

#### **Mid/Late Paintbrush Turkey's Reign:**

1. Mr Frog(original) is looking for a way to bring Joseph down, but helps him while he looks for an appropriate opportunity

1b. Mr Frog(clone) interrogates Vanya, notes that he's missing some memories but writes it off as unimportant.

2. Ecem and Bugi (Ballpoint contractors) make a deal with Mr Frog, rip up Joseph's place in exchange for Mr Frog's lost blueprints.

#### **Late Paintbrush Turkey's Reign/Early Splint's Reign:**

1. Urist breaks Vanya out of prison

1b. Hans triggers Splint's Patented TalviTrap™.

1c. The Master's spearpoint, still in Urist's possession, glows as Armok leads Vanya and Urist to safety.

Pretty sure the above is capable of explaining the continuity... Is there anything I missed?

**Talvieno strikes Continuity Snarl in the head, shattering the skull and tearing the brain!**

**Continuity Snarl has been struck down.**

## **SPLINT:**

### **19th Granite, 207.**

A soldier by the name of Jack Magnus has felt a surge of divine wrath enter his body while he fought the remaining undead today, proclaiming himself a lord of the axe. Clean up is still slow and horrible.

I've gone back into my ledgers and have begun sorting from the bones what is useful and what isn't. Whatever can't be made into ammo or crafts as been given the almighty magma chute order. Took some doing.... but then, the voices have begun encroaching on my mind again, and it did wonders to silence them. I grabbed a few beekeepers and ordered them to get to work on the bones, as anything useful is going to be put to use.

Before the day closed, another dwarf has named himself a pikemaster. Seems Mr Frog's simulation chamber has improved their morale and willingness to fight considerably.



### 20th Granite, 207.

Seeing as cave adaptation is a serious threat, I've decided, partially to clean up some of the logs we've got laying about, to build a nice overland statue garden. If we have any iron left over from the standing forge orders, I'll have some fine iron statues commissioned to decorate it. It will also sport towers as a precaution.



A fellow named Lor also informed me no-one else was allowed to... well... He's....

Lor Asteshekast, Fortress Guard has grown attached to a holistic spawn bone crossbow!

I didn't even know we had crossbows made of *them*.... I've also ordered the walls torn down in the work areas. I despised those stupid cell setups in the capital. It made it seem more like our workshops were prison cells rather than workspaces. I've ordered doors bolted in too. Berserkers have never torn down doors in my experience, so we'll be fine.

### 28th granite, 207.

Amazing! We have finally been recognized for all our hard efforts! Simon Tam said he recommended me for the honor. Nothing a little ego stroking can harm, we have black bronze and most things I'll probably decide to mandate at random will be of some use or another. I just hope I don't get a sudden urge to have something made from blue diamond...

### 3rd Slate, 207.

Finally that bastard slipped up. We spotted him at the site of the garden, and the two dwarves on site, Bloodeyes and Askad, leapt upon him! As Fischer was unavailable, the two fought admirably, punching numerous holes in him before Fischer got wind and came in to finish him with a shield to the brain. Terrahex was also seen leaving the battle, his quiver empty. Evidently nobody even knew he was there except Fischer, and that was after the fact.

I also noticed many of the smaller apartments haven't had their chests and cabinets installed. I've also found something disturbing: One of the veteran apartments was given to a child. As the child has done nothing for the fortress, I am switching them out with one of the soldiers. Only those who put their lives at risk deserve the deluxe accommodations. Also once the liaison leaves, I plan to name Fischer our Champion. He's earned it.

The skulker's barracks has been put up, complete with communal accommodations for storage needs. It may not be enough for all of them, but at least they have a place now. Also, my rooms are nearly done and been brought up to baron's

standards. Still have some tree that need to be uprooted though.

[Fischer, Splint, and Talvi have grand bedrooms. Mr Frog, you're part of a reserve unit now so you should have something to bitch about IC (being forced to carry a loaded crossbow everywhere when you have much better weapons for yourself for example)]

**(Splint):** I did some ego stroking with the barony, since I already had a decent office and bedroom and still hadn't finished my dining room/ proper meeting room. Also as we weren't using it for anything I plated my floor with Zinc, though that was largely just to keep trees from going in them and to boost value a little bit. May need to dig Talvi a basement for her spoilerite statue otherwise my game dorf will pitch a fit (Story splint won't give two shits what other dorfs have.)

[[Talvieno's note: It wasn't adamantine. It was microcline.]]

## TALVIENO:

Zinc? No, no, Splint... *Gold* is the way to go. Solid gold floors, chairs, everything. Write it in as dwarf! Splint trying to make life worth living again after the loss of his beloved Stova or something - we never really did much with that story, anyway, and it had so much meat on it, too.

Think about it:

### **Ministory about Splint's Romance**

Splint and Stova meet during the Vampiric Wars, fighting desperately to rid the world of the bloodsucking vampires that threatened to take over the known world. They fight numerous battles alongside each other, saving each others lives scores of times and always emerging victorious, and over the course of many years, they forge a strong bond between them that eventually blossoms into love. When the Spawn of Holistic begin to arrive, they are sent forth with five other dwarves, a few of which had also previously been members of their squad, to found a military outpost to protect the mountainhome. Splint suddenly finds himself behind a desk, while Stova continues fighting alongside her best friend, Fischer.

The second year in, the Holistic Spawn attack the young fortress. Stova leads the green recruits into combat alongside Fischer, but Splint, unaware of what's going down, is sifting through piles of paperwork and doesn't show up as he always did before. Stova and Fischer fight bravely, but Stova, as good a fighter as she is, is so used to fighting alongside Splint that she manages to back herself into a corner, calling her lover's name, at first confidently, and finally in terrified desperation as row upon row of blood-dripping, twisted teeth drive themselves into her flesh, right before Fischer beheads the monstrosity.

Afterwards, Stova drifts in and out of consciousness with Splint sitting by her bedside, holding her hand. What's done is done, but he still curses himself constantly for not being there to assist her as he always had before. Despite knowing what's coming, he can't bring himself to plunge his sword into her heart, so much he cares for her, so much he clings to the hope that somehow, someday, she'll survive... even to the day she turns, and is struck down before his very eyes. Heartbroken, he lays his sword upon her tomb, with the silent promise that no enemy shall ever make it far enough into the fortress as to remove it from her breast, where he should've

had the strength to put it himself before she turned.

Splint never recovers, and completely neglects the hospital afterwards, as it reminds him too much of his beloved Stova, and even goes out of his way to avoid it.

Eventually it falls into disarray, but Splint doesn't care. He tries to busy himself with keeping Spearbreakers alive to keep his mind off his loss, but the heartache is too deep, and it burns vivid nightmares into his mind as he sleeps - she's always in his dreams, looking at him with tear-streaked face and asking, "Why, Splint? Why weren't you there? I called for you, Splint - why didn't you come?" His reaction in the dream is different every time - sometimes he turns away, sometimes he breaks down, sometimes he yells in anger for her to just leave him alone - but despite the nightmares, he still loves her deeply, and makes a solemn vow never to look at a woman again. And he never does.

Finally, after a few years, his staid facade begins to falter, and the emotionless charade he's played begins to feel its age - the dreams are making their way into his waking mind as the terrors of leagues upon leagues of undead mesh with the bitter, harsh reality of blood raining from the sky - horrors no dwarf should ever need to face. Though made baron, it isn't enough. He paves his floor with gold, builds himself a monument of which dwarves make pilgrimages to see for years to follow, but it still isn't enough. Nothing will ever be enough; nothing will ever bring his beloved Stova back from the dead. No vengeance will ever be enough to satisfy him; no victory will ever feel as it did when Stova was there by his side; even the food of the gods is tasteless to him, nothing but a bitter reminder of how sweet his love had been. He's been through the fire and through the flames, and lost all that was dear to him. He doesn't really care about anything anymore.

But to his last breath, he will protect her grave. As long as there is still an ounce of strength coursing through his veins, Spearbreakers shall never fall.

[[Talvieno's journal: The following journal entries were collected from all over the thread. They've been placed at the correct points in the timeline for your convenience.]]

## TALVIENO:

### **From Vanya's Journals**

*This is a well-worn journal. It menaces with flaps of binding worn from the back cover by a chainsword blade. The writing is flowing and has its moments of dullness, and you find yourself skipping a number of pointless little stories before Vanya makes another actual journal entry, immediately following a number of crossed out attempts.*

Alone... Dwarves use that word often. "I'm forever alone," they say, referencing a dabbling engraver's art as a joke that has a tinge of sadness. But even as they make the joke to someone, they're not fully alone. They *have* someone to talk to, who actually cares about how they're doing, or else the joke couldn't have been made. Jokes require at least two people, and neither one of them can be alone at the time. Of course, the person in question often means a relationship by "forever alone", but in the end, what do they *really* want? They want a close friendship with someone; they want someone who cares about them and supports them during their times of tribulations with a helpful smile.

But that's exactly who they make the joke to, so can you really say they're alone?

Dwarves may love their booze, but they also love companionship.

I've been completely alone for several months now. There's not a soul in my cell besides myself and a little spider whom, on occasion, I've caught myself talking to almost as if it was a puppy. In a way, even Mr Frog's unexpected visit was welcome to me. For a brief while, I had someone to talk to. He even provided me with a basin of water, an old rag, and a hairbrush afterwards, so I could finally clean myself up.

This journal has become almost my companion. I write in it to express my feelings now; to talk when something confuses me. Where I used to cry, I've begun to write instead. And as any good companion should, it listens, as best as it can. It doesn't tell my secrets or my dreams, and it doesn't ignore me and leave its pages blank and listless. It remembers everything I tell it... but can you really say that it cares? It's this lack of care about my feelings or my situation that keeps it from being a *true* friend. And therefore, I am alone. In a fairy tale, it would be the perfect opportunity for me to be rescued... but real life is rarely ever like stories. Recently, however, I found myself with a number of wholly unexpected companions. I've tried several times now to successfully explain what happened... but I've finally decided to write everything down exactly as I witnessed it, completely from my perspective at the time.

I'd laid down on my little bed-shelf one night, hearing the time bells chiming the hour as I drifted off to sleep. At some point, I seemed to awaken, and I saw the familiar form of Joseph's spy, Carena, sitting before me with a knowing smile on her face. Slowly everything faded to black a second time, and I later awoke abruptly in a very unfamiliar place.

~~~

"Wake up, sleepyhead," a cheerful voice said almost mockingly, startling me from my dreamless slumber.

I jerked awake, trying to sit up and get away, but found my arms and legs firmly fastened down with straps of an unusual fabric. Looking about wildly, I took in my surroundings. I was lying on a hospital bed which had the upper half tilted upwards, and surrounded by strange machines and bright lights. There wasn't a torch or flame anywhere in sight, and I'd never seen artificial lights so bright before. The walls were colored white, except for one diagonal wall to my left which had a large piece of metal across it like a mirror - so shiny that I could see my reflection.

It all reminded me of horror stories of mad doctors.

A dwarf was standing past my feet, and it was a few seconds before I recognized her: Wari, the lazy nurse from the Spearbreakers hospital. I struggled to get away, uselessly.

"Calm down, girl, there's no reason to fight the restraints," Wari said with a smile, working with various levers and buttons on the machinery nearest her. She seemed to be watching some sort of panel that glowed with light... it was magic. I couldn't recall ever having seen magic before.

"Don't worry. We already know you're an elf, and that's actually partially why you're here," she continued, almost absentmindedly.

I was terrified of what she was going to do, but I laid back against the bed. "Where

am I?" I asked breathlessly in a panic. I couldn't recall ever having seen this room in Spearbreakers before.

"You're at Parasol, dear," she said as she worked, tapping the ever-changing screen on her machine.

A strange voice filled the room, seeming to come from everywhere and nowhere. It was a man's voice, and louder than it should've been. "Agent, it's against protocol to tell that sort of thing to the prisoner."

Wari looked up at the mirror on the wall and spoke to it with a humorous chuckle.

"Oh, calm down, Eric, it's not like she's going to remember any of it. Plus, if we can calm her down, the treatment will be more likely to take. And let's not call her a prisoner, hmm?" She turned to me, working with a strange handheld device, with a glass plate on it the same as the machinery. "You're at Parasol, dear," she said again, patting my leg. "I'm Wari, and what's your name?"

I could hear my voice quavering. "I'm V," I replied hesitantly.

She smiled. "V? That's no good, sweetcakes, we need your full name. Can you give us your full name?"

I shook my head. I never gave *anyone* my full name.

Again she smiled, condescendingly. "Oh, come on now. If you tell us, we'll let you go sooner. We're not going to hurt you, I promise. Can't you tell me?" She leaned forwards and put her hand on mine. I would've pulled it away, if it hadn't been restrained at the wrist.

"Vanya Carena," I said in a small voice. I'd just broken my rule of keeping my name a secret, but she'd said she knew I was an elf, so what did it matter anymore?

With a little laugh she turned from me and walked slowly back to her machines, tapping at the device she held in her hand before inserting it into a slot. "That's better, dear, much better." She looked at me with an almost friendly smile. "I'm glad you're cooperating, Vanya. We're on your side, you know. Just trying to help you out, and get your help in return."

I shook my head. I didn't want to help *anyone*. I just wanted to get back home. Then it registered that she'd said she wanted to help me, and I was cautious as I asked, "Why do you want my help?"

She turned back to her work. "We'll get to that later, but first I need to ask you a couple questions."

I decided to stall for time. "What is that you're working with?"

"It's a computer, dear," she answered nonchalantly. I hadn't gained nearly as much time as I would've liked. "Now, you remember your childhood, yes? Who were your parental guardians?"

A crackling sound saved me from answering, along with sparks spraying out of one of the metal boxes on the wall across from my feet. Wari saw it and glanced up at the mirror. "Eric, get somebody down here, the Ionization Control has a bad board," she said unconcernedly, muttering something about "stupid electrical equipment". Looking back at me, she told me, "Hold that thought - this'll take just a minute."

A door opened behind my head, out of my field of vision. Someone in a white lab coat like Mr Frog sometimes wore walked over to the sparking equipment and opened it up. I stared in fascination at the many greenish boards it contained - it wasn't like anything I'd ever seen before. The boards had strange pieces of colored metal stuck to them, and were traced all over with tiny gold lines.

In a moment, the worker had removed one of the boards and replaced it with a new one, closed the machine up again and left.

"Now, parents, grandparents, relatives - who took care of you while you were young?" the question came again with a smile.

"Do I have to answer?" I asked in a whisper. I'd given up on escape, but I didn't go around telling everyone about my former life.

The smile vanished and was replaced with a tired, serious glare. "Honey, you ever seen lightning? The bed you're lying on can send a burst of it straight through your skin. Trust me, it isn't something you would enjoy. If you don't give us any trouble, we won't give any to you, deal?"

I bit my lip to keep from crying at the threat. "Mmm-hmm," I managed in affirmative. It was a few seconds before I could collect myself. "My grandparents took care of me."

She turned back to her computer and began tapping at it with her fingers. "All right, and which of them were nicest to you?"

"My grandmother," I said, gulping back tears, "but she's dead now."

"That's all right. What was her occupation? Her job?"

I understood the word "occupation", but at the moment, I was so scared I didn't even care to say so. "She was a cheesemaker," I answered, almost hyperventilating with fear.

As she continued tapping at her computer, I suddenly burst out, "Can you *please* tell me *what's going on??*?"

She stopped and put everything away, giving me her full attention. "There's no reason for you to freak out, okay? Take deep breaths. Just relax.

"You're being mentally reconditioned in a few ways because of your unique position - an elf in a fortress of dwarves, who's actually capable of keeping your identity hidden. The mental reconditioning will help with a few different things - combat and stealth abilities, for example. It'll also provide us a mental link to you for when we require your assistance. You needn't worry about it getting out that you're an elf - no one will know."

I nodded slowly, taking it all in. "Have you done this before?" I asked quietly, feeling myself slowly calm down.

"Yes, but we've actually never done this successfully with your species," Wari admitted almost sheepishly. "Elves are particularly resistant to mind alteration technology as it is, so we're going to be trying a new approach to try to make the effect last longer than a few weeks. We'll be giving you a special bracelet to attempt to keep your implanted memories from fading."

I had no idea what she'd meant by that, but something else came to my attention, my mind finally processing it. I looked at her suspiciously. "What do you mean, 'assistance'?"

She gave a twisted little smile. "Spy work. You're going to become the perfect undercover agent - you won't even know you belong to us until we need you."

I tugged at my restraints. I couldn't believe what she was saying. "*Belong* to you??"

I said in disgust, hearing my voice increase in volume. "Spying on people?

I'm *not* going to spy on anyone!"

"Of course you're not, honey," Wari lied reassuringly, walking to my side and injecting something into my arm with a needle. "Just lay back and let the machine finish its magic, deal?"

I felt myself slipping from conscious thought as everything went black...

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I awoke abruptly in a very unfamiliar place.

"Wake up, sleepyhead," a cheerful voice said, startling me from my dreamless slumber.

I tried to sit up, but found my arms and legs firmly fastened down with straps of an unusual fabric. Looking about, I took in my surroundings, and found I was in a room

that reminded me of horror stories of mad doctors. A dwarf was standing at my feet, and it was a few seconds before I recognized her: Wari, the lazy nurse from the Spearbreakers hospital. As she approached, I watched, abnormally calm.

"Where am I?" I asked quietly. "I want to go home."

"It's okay, dear," she said soothingly, avoiding my question. "I'm only here to help. What's your name?"

I felt so strangely relaxed. "Vanya Carena."

Wari released my restraints and sat me up in bed, holding out a little golden object.

"Do you know what this is?"

I looked at it. It was a bracelet, golden with roses twisting their way around it, and my initials clearly forged into side. "That's my bracelet," I answered in a daze, taking it from her gentle grasp and slipping it over my hand.

"That's right," she said patronizingly. "Good girl. Do you remember your grandmother?"

I looked at her in childlike admiration. "You know about my grandmother?"

She nodded in encouragement. "I know a bit about her, too. Do you remember her job?"

"Yes," I answered innocently. "She was a metalworker. She made this bracelet for me."

"She wasn't a cheesemaker, then?"

I laughed, smiling as I spoke. "Cheesemaker? No, of course not."

"Very good, Vanya!" she said with a nod and a smile. "Make sure you always keep your little bracelet safe." Then she turned to a strange mirror on the wall. "Eric, we're ready to put her back."

I felt myself slipping from conscious thought as everything went black...

~~~

I awoke abruptly in a familiar room I'd grown to despise, yet at the same time call a home. I was lying on the bed-shelf in my Spawn Research Center prison cell.

And I could remember everything I'd just dreamed.

But the dream felt so *real*. Wari, and the computers, and the little device that she'd held that resembled Mr Frog's... Wari talking about my grandmother...

I stopped. My grandmother *hadn't* been a cheesemaker. I could remember now... I could remember how she used to bring us some of her cheese home from work. I remembered how she used to take me to the market to show me which cheeses were the best, how we would gape over the ones she wished she was good enough to make. She had a little shop I would sometimes help out with on weekends, when I wasn't being tutored. I had been young at the time, hardly eight...

She hadn't been a metalworker at all, and the dream *wasn't* a dream, but an old memory I'd somehow forgotten... perhaps caused by the stupid golden bracelet. The bracelet they'd lied about, making me think my grandmother had made it for me. Making me believe their lies as if they were my own memories.

Thinking about it all made me realize something else: the pull I'd always felt to get my bracelet back was weaker, now... Somehow I simply didn't care as much about it anymore, even *without* knowing it was fake.

I puzzled on it over the course of the day, coming to the conclusion that maybe the bracelet had been designed to *make* me want to keep it close. "*We'll be giving you a special bracelet to attempt to keep your implanted memories from fading,*" Wari had

said. Maybe the longer the bracelet was away from me, the more my false memories faded. Maybe the longer it was away, the less pull it had on me, and the less it made me want to have it back.

I remembered the machine that had broken and thrown sparks while I was in the room, and the idea struck me - what if my bracelet was hollow, like those computers? What if it contained "electrical equipment" too?

I decided right then that I needed to destroy it. If it was keeping a hold on my mind, maybe it was keeping me from remembering my sister, too, and with time, that would fade. Maybe destroying it would prove once and for all to Mr Frog that I wasn't the real enemy, and that it was actually Joseph. Wari had to be working for Joseph, too, just like Carena, though they were apparently from different companies - Parasol and Ballpoint.

And at that, I stopped short in my thoughts. *My name had been Carena... Vanya Carena.*

I shared the name of the elven spy who worked for Joseph. There was no way it could be a coincidence, but what did it mean? And how had I forgotten my last name?? How do I even know what memories are mine anymore? If the ones they implanted are just beginning to fade, and the ones they erased are just beginning to resurface, how can I even trust who I am?



(written later)

That night, as I lay curled on my bed, fast asleep, something hit me in the back. I sat up and looked around until I found the intruding object: a little rock. A glance at the hole in the ceiling revealed nothing, but a glance towards the doorway revealed something I never would've expected to see... not in real life, at least.

It was the face of Urist the Lantern-Jaw... My knight in shining armor had come. It was just like a fairy tale.



HANSLANDA:

Crossing Over

Urist followed Fischer down the hall, as he read a scroll. Urist was keeping up a running commentary at Fischer, "This doesn't make any sense. Twelve soldiers total, until a month ago, when Paintbrushturkey began his reign, and then there's at least thirty! That's patently ridiculous. The equipment lists Splint gave me yesterday indicate that there is simply no way you could equip that many militiadwarves in so short a time. What, are they running around in leather?" Urist shook his head ruefully, "I frankly don't believe you."

Fischer turned the corner, and Urist realized he was at the entrance to the Spawn Research Center. The screeching was much louder here. Fischer stopped, and looked at Urist finally, "You can't come down here. Its off limits."

Urist looked at her, somewhat confused, "Excuse me? I've been down here probably four or five times before. Why wouldn't I be allowed here now?"

"You're just not. Go away, Urist. Bother Draignean for awhile. I've got important matters to tend to." Fischer said. She turned brusquely and slammed the door shut behind her. The click of a lock sounded immediately after.

Urist started to do as she'd said, but was still confused. Why wouldn't he be allowed into the SRC? All that was down there was cells, a few Spawn, and Draignean's chambers. Maybe some secret militia planning in Draignean's room? Urist shook his head, and resolved to return later in the day.

That night, or so the shift drums suggested, Urist crept down the deserted hallway to the SRC, hugging the wall. He didn't bother trying to cover up the noise he made walking, no one would notice with the spawn shrieking constantly. He opened the door, now unlocked, and slipped through. Draignean's door was open, and he could hear Draignean preening in front of the mirror to himself, "This suit is simply magnificent. How do you do it, Draignean?" The smug voice echoed down the hallway gently. Urist dashed past the door quietly, and continued down the hallway. All the cells that were unused remained open, except for the few at the end.

Except...

Except one extra cell was closed. Urist felt he had found what was being hidden from him.

Urist crept up to the cell door, and peered through from a cautious distance. Inside, some crude furniture had been set up. On a rough slab, next to an equally rough chair, was a pile of rags. Urist crinkled his nose. No dwarf deserved to be in a prison like this, surely. Their crime must have been unimaginable. He picked up a pebble from the floor, and tossed it.

It plunked off the ragged shirt, and the pile jerked about until Urist saw a familiar face peering at him.

...he slammed against the wall heavily. He swam back through the fog to consciousness, shaking his head, and feeling a touch on his face. A beautiful face was inches from his, concern and fright in her eyes. "Are you hurt?" He shook his head and started to reply when Sarvesh dashed in front of the spawn, and buried his hammer deep into its side. The concerned female shrank out of Urist's sight, as he focused on the spawn as it killed Sarvesh.

The spawn bore down on Urist, and he struggled to sit upright. Suddenly, he heard a female voice scream a wordless battle cry, and he saw that beautiful female tackle the spawn. It fell heavily on the embedded hammer, crushing its own heart with its weight.

The female looked back at Urist, and he nodded at her. She seemed to glow with appreciation...

Urist jerked as if struck. "My god. It's you!" He forgot himself, and said it a bit louder than he intended.

The female blushed, "Well, I'd hope I'm me, but I'm not so sure these days."

Urist shook his head, "You saved me. From a spawn. You *tackled* a spawn. You were completely unarmed."

She shrugged, "I... Yes, I guess I did. I just had to save you."

Urist looked at the portcullis, "Why are you in here?" She teared up a bit and shook her head. As she did, Urist spotted pointed ears poking through the ratty hair. He was quietly surprised by this, but he didn't want to accuse her of anything rashly. She said, "I know too much."

Urist set his jaw grimly, "About what? What could you possibly know too much about that would give someone the right to put you in this hellhole?"

"Mr Frog's plans, I guess. Or maybe Spearbreakers itself." She shrugged again.

Urist thought long and hard about this. Finally, grimly, he said, "Well, I don't care. No one deserves this. I'm going to get you out of here. I owe you that much at least."

Give me a few hours, and I will get you out of here. But first, what is your name?" She smiled, a glimmer of hope in her eyes. "I'm V... I mean Vanya. I'm Vanya." Suddenly, her face twisted in fear, as if she expected him to spit on her, and she covered her ears.

Urist shook his head, "I don't care what kind of ears you have. You saved my life. Being an elf doesn't change that." He heard a rustle down the hall from Draigneane's room, and he turned back to Vanya one more time, "Wait for me. I will return soon." He then ducked into the cell across the hall, flattening himself against the wall next to the door.

Urist heard Draigneane walking briskly down the hall, then heard him say, "Who were you talking to? Were you talking to me?" Vanya murmured something too low for Urist to hear, and Draigneane scoffed, "Well, I don't care what you were praying about. Be quiet. I can hardly hear myself talk over the spawn as it is, I don't need you adding to the thunderous din in here." Booted footsteps receded down the hallway.

Urist rolled his eyes at the theatric quality of Draigneane's voice, and spotted something interesting.

The feeding chute in the ceiling.

Later that night, and true to his word, Urist returned to the SRC. This time though, he carried a couple extra items, and he went into the feeding chamber instead of the hallway proper. He crept past the grates til he reached the one he wanted. He lifted the heavy metal grate, gently setting it against the wall with a *tink*. Inside the cell below him, Vanya was sitting on her bed, staring at the door fixedly. Urist uncoiled the rope wrapped around his body, and dropped it in. Vanya jumped back, obviously startled, but quickly started climbing the rope.

She was light, incredibly so. Urist easily held the rope steady even with her weight on it. When she got to his level and off the rope, he dropped the rope and handed her a hooded cloak. She looked at it somewhat curiously, until he said, "It'll hide your ears for now. It's raining above, so no one will question it." Vanya nodded, and Urist set the grate back into its housing. They slipped unnoticed out of the feeding area, and into the workshops area.

Neither Urist nor Vanya spotted the preternaturally quiet, very still dwarf leaning crouched in the shadows. Terrahex watched them leave, then swiftly jogged down to Draigneane's room.

Urist and Vanya made it out of the workshops level before the alarm was sounded. Loud, heavy drumbeats echoed through the fortress like a giant's heartbeat. Suddenly soldiers were rushing toward the living quarters. A couple of soldiers passed within arms reach of Urist and Vanya, not glancing at the odd pair. Urist grabbed Vanya by the hand and started pulling her, faster. They reached an alcove, and ducked inside for a moment. Urist said, "I had planned to get you to the caravan, but they'll be expecting that. We have to go down."

Vanya shuddered, and nearly whimpered, "I am afraid of the depths."

Urist sighed ruefully, "We have no choice. We must go." Vanya nodded slowly, her eyes squeezed shut tightly. She opened them reluctantly as Urist gently pulled her with him, out of the alcove.

Down they went. They only made it a few levels down before Vanya spotted a squad of soldiers moving up the stairs, checking ears of passing dwarves. She tugged at Urist, and he nodded. They slipped down the hallway into the living quarters, and around the corner. Around the corner after that, Urist collided heavily with another soldier.

This dwarf was tall, but not unusually so like Mr Frog. He was muscular and broad-

bodied. He had a long flowing beard and short cut hair. He looked at Urist blankly, and said, "I'll ask ya to not touch me without permission, tha- Wait, is that the fuggita- the fugitt- the runner?!" He pointed at Vanya as he said the last, his apparently slow mind working hard to process the sudden turn of events. Urist panicked and let go of Vanya. He punched the other dwarf square in the nose as hard as he could. The big fellow rocked back, stunned by the attack. Urist followed up with a rough shove, that sent the dwarf stepping back a couple of steps. Vanya screamed as Urist pressed his attack, and Urist nearly turned to make sure no other soldiers had appeared behind them. That moment of distraction cost him dearly, as the soldier regained his equilibrium and went on the attack. Urist threw another punch, but the soldier leaned a bit, and it sailed past his head. The soldier's muscular arm wrapped around Urist's wrist like a vise, and the soldier pounded a heavy punch into Urist's flank, knocking the wind out of him. Urist headbutted, and connected with the soldier's nose again.

The soldier growled, "Quit hittin me there!" As he punched Urist in the guts again. Then the soldier twisted, locking Urist's arm and taking Urist off balance. The soldier shifted one leg, and threw Urist to the ground easily, and started punching him in the face.

Vanya dashed in, grabbing the burly soldier's arm as it lifted for another vicious punch. He turned, and she said, with tears in her eyes, "Please... Please stop!" The soldier's hateful mask of a face relaxed back into blissful blankness, and he let go of Urist.

Vanya was dumbstruck at the change of heart. The soldier had a abashed look on his face, and said, "I'm sorry, missus. I din't mean to be upsettin' a ladyfolk like you. I just... He hit me first... And my training took over... I din't... I'm sorry."

Vanya helped Urist stand, and Urist said, "I thought you were going to arrest us." The soldier's eyes went bulged, "Arrest you? I just wanted to ask why she was a fugig- A runnin' away. I don't think I've heard of anybody stealing anything or anything. I just figurt you made Splint angry. He gets angry a lot. He goes through so many mugs."

Urist shook his head, "What she did isn't important. We have to hide, someone will have heard that scuffle."

The soldier nodded, "Let's go into my room, right here. I'll keep watch."

Urist and Vanya scurried into the small room, and the big dwarf stood inside the door, watching the hallway for signs of life. Vanya turned to Urist and said, "I wish I was as brave as you. Fighting spawn, breaking me out of confinement, attacking an armored soldier with your bare hands. You've... You're so brave. I wish I wasn't afraid, like you."

Urist smiled lopsidedly, "Oh, I was very afraid. I thought that spawn was going to eat me, or that that big fellow was going to demolish me."

Vanya's awed look faltered, "You are afraid? But... But you attacked him! You fought..."

Urist shook his head, "Just because I was afraid doesn't mean I'm weak. That's what being brave is, doing something courageous, even when you're scared. Especially when you're scared. I'd be a fool to not be scared."

Vanya started to speak, but the big soldier turned and hustled them through the adjoining room, murmuring, "They're a comin'! Come on, let's get ya'll out of here quicklike."

They burst out the other side into a corridor. Urist turned to Vanya after checking to make sure the coast was clear, "Don't let your fears rule you. We *will* get you out of here. I promise." Vanya didn't speak, but she did something brave. She leaned up on her tiptoes, and kissed Urist on the lips, lightning quick.

Urist rocked back on his heels, stunned and confused. Vanya turned bright red, and

pulled the hood down over her face roughly, obviously embarrassed. Before they could speak about it though, a shout at the end of the hall forced their hand, "Found them! Fischer! I found them!"

The trio started running. Down the stairs they went, past the inhabited levels, into the old mining sectors. After gaining a slight lead on the armed, armored, and more importantly, encumbered soldiers, the three stopped at an oddly placed lever. The big soldier had a grim look in his eye, and he said, "I want you two to go down until you see a fresh carved hallway. Run through it as fast as you can. I'm staying here. Meet up with me in the old malachite vein."

Vanya said, "Before we go, what is your name? Why are you helping us?"

The soldier smiled gently, "I'm Hans. And you seem like a nice lady. No nice lady deserves to be imprisoned." He waved them away, "Go on. *Run* through that hallway. Don't stop." The sound of approaching soldiers was getting louder, once again forcing their course of action.

Urist and Vanya sprinted through the hallway, past the weak supports. Once through, they heard a commotion at the entrance. Urist turned, and saw a squad of soldiers file onto the balcony in front of the hallway. As they did, a rumble was heard, growing louder and louder. The spindly supports collapsed suddenly, and the whole hallway crashed shut with all the finality uncountable tons of earth could muster.

Vanya shrieked, sure the earth was going to swallow them up next, but as the dust clear, she saw they were just barely out of the danger zone. Safe.

TALVIENO:

More From Vanya's Journal

Vanya's flowing script continues through the following pages, but this appears to be one of the final entries in her journal. Where her next journal lies you cannot say, yet you continue reading the adventures of the atypically dwarven elf.

Urist the Lantern-Jawed stood in the doorway, peering inwards at me. He wasn't dressed in a suit of shining steel armor like he'd always been before, though, nor did he have his weapon. He looked at me almost in surprise, and suddenly jumped as if startled out of his thoughts. "My god..." he spoke loudly, "It's you!"

I hadn't expected him to remember me, and I felt a tinge of color creeping into my cheeks as I stumbled through my reply, "I'd hope I'm me, but I'm not so sure these days..." I felt almost ashamed to be sitting before him in such a sorry state, but he didn't seem to care, only shaking his head at me in wonderment. "You saved me. You tackled a spawn, completely unarmed."

"I..." I hesitated. I'd tackled *him*, not the spawn. I wondered if maybe it wasn't me he was remembering after all, but I worried that if I denied it, he'd leave. "Yes, I guess I did... I just had to save you." The last part was true, at least.

He paused for a moment, taking everything in. All I could take in was the fact that *he* was there, talking to *me*. *Me*, the skulker girl no one ever noticed, holding a conversation with the most handsome dwarf in the fortress.

It could've been Christmas.

Urist grabbed the portcullis bars with his hands and shook them gently, testing their strength. He asked curiously, "But why are you in here?"

A prison cell twenty feet from two imprisoned spawn really wouldn't have been my choice for the location of a first date. I shook my head disappointedly, wishing I was somewhere else. Finally, I cautiously said, "I know too much..." I couldn't tell him the truth: that I was accused of being a spy. That would *really* not be the way to make a good first impression.

He looked at me suspiciously. "You know too much? About what? What could you possibly know that would give someone the right to put you in this hellhole?"

I paused. I did know too much... but it had little to do with Spearbreakers. "Mr Frog's plans, I guess. Or maybe Spearbreakers itself," I lied, shrugging and hoping he wouldn't keep asking questions.

Fortunately, he didn't. "Well, no one deserves this. I'm going to get you out - I owe you that much, at least. Give me a few hours, and I'll get you out of here. But first... Miss, what is your name?"

I smiled despite my best attempts to hide my blissful ecstasy: my crush actually cared enough to ask my name. I gave it to him eagerly. "Vanya. My name is Vanya." Then I paused, shocked at what I'd done.

I'd given him my name. My *elfen* name. Since he'd arrived, I'd been so happy that I'd forgotten: I'm an elf. My heart sank, my hopes shattered: *all* dwarves hate elves. In shame, I covered my pointed ears with my hands, silently cursing my heritage. Urist interrupted my thoughts with a frown and a shake of his head. "You saved my life. Being an elf doesn't change that."

I looked up at his face, my eyes widening in surprise.

"Wait for me," he said quietly as he turned away, vanishing into the shadows, "I will return soon, Vanya."

I could hardly contain my excitement and happiness. Urist didn't care! Elves are so often discriminated against (for obvious reasons), but Urist didn't care; he was willing to give me a chance. I laughed happily, the sound of my voice echoing through the dim, flickering light of the Spawn Research Center. I was smiling, twirling, dancing about the room as I gathered up my few belongings, my thoughts often straying to the brave, handsome, gentlemanly dwarf with the lantern jaw. I'd never been so happy.

I waited for him, sitting on my bed and watching out the portcullis bars, dreaming of true love and romance. So wrapped up in my thoughts was I that I didn't notice the footsteps in the hallway above, until a rope fell from the feeding hole in the roof of my cell. I glanced upwards - it was Urist, holding the rope tightly. I ran over to it and tried to pull myself upwards, but found to my embarrassment that I could hardly lift my own weight. Exercises in a prison cell only go so far towards keeping your muscles in good condition.

"Help!" I whispered up to him.

He began pulling me upwards as I climbed, and with our combined effort, I was soon at the top.

Smiling as prettily as I could, I thanked him gratefully. He only nodded in response and handed me a cloak. "It'll hide your ears," he explained. "It's raining blood above, so no one will question it."

I took the hooded cloak and put it on, pulling the hood down over my head. He was already leaving towards the workshops, and I followed, having to almost jog to keep

up with his long strides. "Wait!" I whispered. "Where are we going?"

"There's an early elven caravan here," he said, never slowing his pace. "If I can get you up there, no one will expect a thing. It's too dangerous for you to stay at Spearbreakers anymore"

I nodded in disappointment, feeling a familiar sinking sensation in my chest, any thoughts of romance having been soundly beaten into dust. "I won't forget you, Urist," I whispered quietly. But he didn't hear, and we continued towards the stairs.

A loud drumming began, a rhythmic *rum-pum-pum-BOOM-pum*. Urist halted his movement, and I almost slammed into him. "Damn it!" he cursed, scowling. "How did they know?"

I didn't understand. "What?"

"The drums - it's the call for all military units to station themselves at the caravan. They know we're coming. We are going to have to go down instead."

"What??" I exclaimed again, this time in surprise. "I can't go down there!" I was fine in the upper layers, but the mines?? So deep underground? "I can't see in the dark like a dwarf, you know..."

He sighed ruefully. "We have no choice. We must go."

I nodded slowly, biting my lip. Urist grabbed my hand and took me with him, and for a moment, his touch was the only thing on my mind, and it strengthened my resolve.

We passed several soldiers on the way towards the stairs, none of whom paused to look at us. Anyone would've mistaken us for a blacksmith and his wife - a thought I took an odd sort of pleasure in. But it wasn't long until we were on our way down. However, several flights below I could see soldiers checking the ears of passing dwarves. "The stairways aren't safe," I told Urist, pulling at his arm to slow his descent. "There's only one stairwell in Spearbreakers, and they'll be watching for me."

"Do you have a better idea?" he asked doubtfully with a raised eyebrow.

I nodded. "I'm basement class..." I admitted. "I know of hidden passageways most people wouldn't dream of."

For a moment, I actually thought I saw him smile. "Lead the way," he said, stepping back to follow.

I led Urist back up the stairs to the living quarters. Past the Spawn Research Center there was an old mine with numerous tunnels branching off from it, leading underground. Most of them were small, dark, and tight... but being terrified of small spaces is better than being terrified of how the Hammerer is about to smash your skull.

We turned the corner and smashed into a giant of a dwarf, wearing full armor and carrying a massive warhammer. I fell backwards in surprise.

The giant furrowed his brow threateningly and spoke, rumbling in a deep voice. "I'll ask ya to not touch me without permission, thank - " His glance fell on me as I got to my feet behind Urist. Recognition slowly spread over his face, and he looked at me in suspicion. "Wait, is that a futigi... fugiti..." he stumbled over the word, pointing at me. "A runner?"

Urist stepped forwards, his muscles bulging as he threw a powerful right hook that caught the giant square in the nose, sending him several steps backwards and his warhammer clanging to the floor.

I hadn't expected Urist to hit him; it came as a complete surprise. I heard myself yell in astonishment.

Urist heard me yell, too, and looked in my direction. My eyes widened in fear as I

saw the giant pull back for a punch. "Urist!" I screamed, trying desperately to warn him.

He turned back, barely in time to dodge the punch. He threw a counterswing, but the giant stopped it in midair, catching the punch in his huge palm as easily as if it had been all in play. With Urist's right hand caught firmly in his grip, he pounded a fist into Urist's side, knocking the wind out of him.

I looked around to see if anyone had noticed and would come to help, but no one had. Turning back, I saw the giant toss Urist onto the ground like a ragdoll, towering over him and pummeling his face with punches that surely would've knocked me unconscious. I felt as though I could feel every blow Urist received, my eyes tearing up at his pain. It had all been to protect me...

"Stop! Please, stop!" I cried out, rushing forwards and grabbing the giant's arm, throwing myself in the way.

He looked at me in surprise, and his face seemed to go blank as he processed what was going on, his arm hovering in midair. Finally, he calmed, letting Urist go. "I... I'm sorry, missus," he said slowly, an ashamed look on his face. "I din't mean to be upsettin' a ladyfolk like yourself... I just... He hit me first... I din't... I'm sorry." He was honest, and he seemed to be gentle at heart. But I was still mad at him.

I offered Urist my hand, pulling him to his feet. "I thought you were going to arrest us," Urist said, feeling his nose tenderly.

The giant looked at Urist as if he was retarded. "Arrest you? I jus' wanted t'ask why she was runnin' away. I'll tell ya I don't think I've ever heard of anybody stealing anything or anything... I just figurt you made Splint angry - he gets angry a lot; goes through so many mugs."

Urist shook his head. "What she did isn't important. We have to hide; someone will have heard our little scuffle."

The giant nodded. "Let's go into my room, right here. I'll keep watch."

We were ushered into the big soldier's tiny room, which seemed much too small for him. He took position outside, watching the hallways.

I ripped a small, tattered piece of cloth from the sleeve of my blouse and began to wipe the blood from Urist's face. "I'm so sorry," I whispered. "That was all my fault." Urist took my hand gently in his and moved it away, looking at me curiously. "How was it your fault?"

"If I hadn't yelled, you wouldn't have looked towards me, and you would've won."

He let go of my arm, smiling and shaking his head. "He outmatched me anyway."

I didn't believe it for a second. "But you're so brave. Fighting spawn, rescuing me from prison, attacking an armored soldier with your bare hands..." I paused, glancing away in embarrassment. "I wish I wasn't always so afraid."

He chuckled and gave me a little crooked smile. "Oh, I was very afraid. I thought that spawn was going to eat me, and that big fellow was going to demolish me."

I never could have expected him to say that. "You were afraid??" I asked incredulously. "But you never act like it!"

Urist shook his head. "Fear doesn't make you weak. Courage is doing something brave, even when you're scared. Being afraid keeps you sharp - it keeps you alive." His words seemed wise, and I puzzled over them for a moment, looking at him in wonder. A soldier with a sharp mind is a rarity, especially in these parts... I began to wonder just who he'd been before he came here.

Unannounced, the giant-dwarf burst into the room, and I could hear soldiers yelling in the distance. "They're a'comin'!" he said. "Come on, let's get ya'll outta here all quicklike!"

Startled out of my thoughts, I did something I still can't believe I did - I leaned

forwards and gave Urist a brief kiss on the lips. As he leaned away in surprise, I pulled my hood down tightly over my head, terribly embarrassed. I'd never felt my face so hot before.

Urist recovered and grabbed my hand, pulling me behind him. It was all I could do to follow. I was half in a blissful dreamworld of my own making, reliving the brief kiss in my mind as we rushed back towards the stairwell. Giant-dwarf led the way, bowling over soldiers like kittens as we descended into darkness. Down, down, down we went, far past the deepest I'd ever been, and yet still on we continued.

Without warning, he stopped, looking at us with a grim determination. "I want you two to go down until you see a fresh-carved hallway. Run through as fast as you can, I'll stay here. Meet up with me in the old malachite vein."

Urist didn't move. "Who are you? And why are you helping us?"

Giant-dwarf smiled. "I'm Hans. You seem like nice folk, and no nice lady deserves to be killed." He waved us away. "Now go on, scoot! Run on ahead, fast as you can, and don't stop!"

Soldiers poured down the stairwell, far behind us. I could hear their steel and adamantine boots clanging against the cold, hard stone as they ran.

Urist turned and led me forwards at top speed, following Hans' instructions, between a huge number of pillars that lined the walls of a tall, narrow hallway.

I looked behind us. The soldiers were running towards us, past where Hans had stood only a moment before. I prayed he was all right.

Seconds later it was my own life I was praying for, as behind us, pillars began collapsing. For every pillar that shattered, a huge section of the ceiling caved in, flinging boulders and debris in all directions as the ceiling far above caved in. The collapsing of the pillars increased in tempo, getting faster and faster, and sending up a huge cloud of dust that threatened to swallow us whole.

I screamed in terror, but my voice was lost in the incredible cacophony of falling rock.

"Run, Vanya!" Urist shouted, spurring me on as we sped past pillar after pillar.

"Don't look back!"

I did as he ordered, feeling the shockwaves pounding into my back; feeling the earth shake as the ceiling collapsed closer and closer to our heels, the falling stone threatening to crush us alive. The rushing dust crept forwards until it enveloped us even as we ran, and I tripped, pitching us forwards in a heap just past the last pillars as they, too, shattered and fell.

A gust of air and choking dust rushed past us as the end of the hallway crashed shut with all the finality uncountable tons of earth could muster, the rocks piling themselves only feet from where we lay panting, at the edge of a deep chasm.

We were safe, separated from the army of Spearbreakers by a mighty wall of rock.

As we got to our feet, coughing on the dust, we heard several more crashes as a few remaining pillars collapsed, somewhere deep within the shifting rubble.

At our feet was an invisible ledge, and what seemed like miles below where we stood, I could faintly make out the scattered, flickering fires of the forgotten beasts that lurked beneath the fortress. But neither the light nor the heat reached upwards to us from the depths, and everything around me was the blackest of black.

"Urist," I whispered, "I can't see..." The last of the torches had been crushed within the hallway that Hans had collapsed behind us, and unlike a dwarf, I couldn't see in the dark.

I felt a strong hand take mine. "I'll lead you," Urist said, and we continued onwards

into the thick blackness.

"What now?" I asked him finally. "There's no way I can leave, they'll be watching for me."

"They're after me, too, now... I guess we could stay down here," he suggested, though I could tell his heart wasn't in it.

I shook my head. Even with Urist with me, walking among deep chasms in total darkness wasn't my idea of romantic, even *after* having been a resident of Spearbreakers for several years. "No," I said. "I don't like it down here."

There was silence for a while between us, before he finally spoke. "You kissed me."

With all the excitement that comes with almost getting crushed to death, I'd

forgotten. I blushed deeply. "I... I'm sorry," I began. "I didn't -"

He chuckled, seemingly amused. "It's okay, I'm not upset."

I bit my lip pensively. "But I'm an elf... No dwarf could ever love an elf."

Urist stopped walking, and I felt his hand rest gently on my shoulder. "If you matter to someone, they won't mind that you're an elf. *I* don't mind. I can't get involved for other reasons, but you being an elf has nothing to do with it."

I didn't believe him, really. "You can't get involved," I repeated quietly to myself, a saddened sigh of disbelief escaping my lips as I tried to take it in.

"I'm married," he explained softly.

I was in love with a married man. My foolish heart had chosen for its first love someone I could never have. I couldn't help the tear that rolled down my cheek as I spoke. "That... would explain things..." I mumbled, stumbling through my words.

"Not entirely," he responded quietly, sighing. "She left me before I came here, and took my child with her. She said I wasn't the same person anymore, after all the terrible things I'd done. And... I think she was right."

I wiped the tear from my cheek. I'd had no idea he'd been through so much... He seemed so depressed - I wanted to comfort him. "Well, if you're a hero *now*... you must've been at least inspiring before."

His hand left my shoulder as he replied, "I'm not really that much of a hero. I get lucky sometimes, I guess, and I try to do the right thing... I've known heroes, and they all have something... something *special* about them." his voice trailed off.

"I think you *do* have something special about you. You seem to have a purpose..." I paused in thought. "I wish I had a purpose..." I let my sentence hang in the air unfinished, as thoughts raced through my mind. "My bracelet!" I gasped. I couldn't believe I'd forgotten about it. Suddenly, I knew what had to be done.

"What?" Urist asked quizzically.

"I have to destroy it! Mr Frog has it. If we can destroy it, I can get you pardoned."

"Why?" he asked, sounding confused. "What's so important about a bracelet?"

I hesitated, unwilling to explain everything. Being an elf was bad enough, but my being an elf who'd had her mind rewritten was something he'd be unlikely to believe.

I shook my head. "I... I can't tell you," I said reluctantly. "It's the key to a puzzle Mr Frog's been trying to figure out. We have to destroy it."

"All right," he sighed resignedly, "we'll destroy it. But how do we accomplish that? We're at least a mile underground, far from any help, alone, and being hunted by soldiers of Spearbreakers caliber. We have no supplies, no weapons, and you can't even see in the dark."

"We're *not* alone," I reminded him. "Hans told us to meet him at 'the old malachite vein'."

"Vanya, I don't even know where that is," Urist said gently, deflating my hopes.

Then something strange happened. Out of the blackness, a strange green-white light shone, so bright I could just make out Urist's face. It appeared to be coming from something attached to his belt, and he took it out, looking at it in fearful awe. It was a broken jade spearpoint, and the whole thing was glowing with a ghostly light, tiny runes engraved in its surface glowing the brightest of all, as if a great power shone through them. As he rotated it in his hands, the glow seemed to dim and brighten, depending on where he pointed it.

Urist laughed nervously, his chiseled features dimly outlined by the spearhead. "This is insane. I've lost my mind, haven't I? Please tell me you see this too."

"I think it's pointing the way," I said hesitantly, brushing the surface of it delicately with my fingertips in wonder.

The nervous smile left his face. "I'm not crazy, then... This is... This is too much, Vanya."

I looked up at his face and beamed at him in delight. "I *told* you there was something special about you." It was surely a gift from the gods; one of them was showing us the way, and our mission could not fail. Well, unless it was Armok... then we'd likely die gruesomely in a sadistically hilarious manner, but I tried not to think about that possibility. Somewhere up there, someone was looking out for us. Nodding slowly, Urist spoke. "We... We'd better go, then. Vanya... I think you have a purpose now."

We set off swiftly in the direction the spearhead pointed us. This time, we weren't fugitives fleeing blindly. No, *this* time... we were on a mission from the gods.



HANSLANDA:

Resolve:

Urist and Vanya coughed and choked on the settling dust from the cave in. They moved down the tunnel at a somewhat leisurely pace, safe in the knowledge that it would take months to search all the mine shafts below the fortress. It was eerily quiet deep beneath the earth, and the two fugitives walked in silence for a long time.

Eventually, Vanya said, "What do we do now? We can't make it out of here, they'll have guards posted at all entrances and exits to the fortress until we are caught."

Urist shrugged heavily, "I'm not sure. I... I just don't know right now." He pursed his lips pensively, then gave Vanya a sly look, "You kissed me."

Vanya turned bright red, and pulled her hood down over her head tightly. She murmured for a moment, and then more loudly said, "I... I'm sorry. I didn't... I don't..."

Urist chuckled and said, "It's okay. I'm not upset."

Vanya's voice had an edge to it when she spoke, "But I'm an elf. No dwarf would ever love an elf."

Urist shook his head and stopped in place. He put one hand on her shoulder and said, "Those who matter won't mind that you're an elf. I don't mind. I can't get involved for other reasons, but you being an elf has nothing to do with it."

Vanya grimaced sadly, and said, "But you can't get involved? What does that mean?"

Urist struggled for words, and then finally said, "I'm married."

A long silence followed that statement. They both stood there in the darkness and silence, alone yet together. Finally, Vanya said, "That... Would explain things I guess." She sounded on the verge of tears.

Urist shook his head sadly, "Not entirely. She left me before I came here, and took my child with her. She said I wouldn't be the same person after all the terrible things I'd been through and done." He sighed, "I think she was right."

Vanya said, "Well, if you're this much of a hero now, you must have been inspiring before."

Urist turned a little red at the compliment, "I'm not really much of a hero. I get lucky sometimes, and I try to do the right thing, but I'm no hero. I've known a few in my time, and they all have something special..." His voice trailed off as he put his hand on his belt pouch, and when he spoke again, it was distractedly, as if his mind was elsewhere, "...something... Something special about them..."

Vanya touched his arm lightly, withdrawing quickly, nervously after she did, "I think you have something special about you. You seem to have a purpose." She chuckled to herself, "I wish I had a-" She gasped, "My bracelet!"

Urist cocked his head quizzically, "What? You wish you had your bracelet? What does-"

Vanya was frantic suddenly, her mind racing, "No, no. I have to destroy it! Mr Frog has it! We have to destroy it."

Urist was still confused, "Why? What's so important about a bracelet?"

Vanya shook her head, "I'm... I can't tell you. I'm not really sure myself, but I just know that the bracelet is important. It has to be destroyed before Mr Frog can use it."

Urist stopped trying to understand and shrugged, "Alright, if you say we have to destroy it, then we have to destroy it. But first, how do we accomplish that? We're probably a mile under ground, far from any help, alone and being hunted by incredibly skilled and intelligent opponents. We have no supplies, no real weapons, and it's just the two of us."

Vanya said, "No, we aren't alone. Hans. He said to meet him at the old malachite vein." Her voice shone with hope.

Urist said it gently, but it still deflated Vanya's optimism, "I don't know where that is. I don't live here."

She sighed, "I never went into the mining areas. It was too dangerous for skulkers. Too easy to get lost, or sealed up when the miners finished in a tunnel. I'm not sure where it is either."

They sat in silence once more. For a long time, they both were just thinking furiously. Then, something strange happened.

Light shone into the darkness of the tunnels. It was coming from Urist's belt pouch. Urist opened the pouch, and took out the only thing it contained. A broken spearpoint. The words engraved in flowing, perfect script on its side were shining fiercely, almost too bright to look at. Urist's face was contorted strangely, mostly fearful but somewhat awed as well. Vanya looked on with confusion, not sure what was going on.

Urist pointed the spearpoint at the wall, and the glow diminished. He turned slowly, keeping it pointed out, and it started to brighten. He kept going, and it lost light past a certain point. Urist barked a short, nervous laugh, then started guffawing crazily. "This is insane. I've lost my mind, haven't I? Please tell me you see this too." He said when he finally could speak again.

Vanya spoke very slowly, "I think it's pointing the way."

Urist sobered abruptly, his grin fading. "I'm not crazy then. This is... This is too much, Vanya."

Vanya smiled at him, and the beauty of her smile in the unearthly light caught his

breath and held it in a vice. She said, "I told you there was something special about you."

Urist tried to speak, but all he could do was nod, dumbstruck. Finally he managed to say, "We... We better go. We've got a purpose now."

They set off swiftly, but this time they were not fugitives fleeing blindly. This time they were on a mission.

Following the guiding light of the spearpoint, they soon reached the vein of malachite. Once they did, the light faded instantly, leaving them once more in the stygian darkness. They crept through the tunnels cautiously now, hoping Hans was there alone, and not as bait for a trap.

As it was, they nearly walked right over him. Hans was crouched against a wall, idly twiddling his thumbs. He heard them walking softly, and said, "I hope that's you, or I'll have to be hurting someone for sneaking about."

"It's us." Vanya said softly.

Hans said, "Oh. Good." He smiled, not realizing she couldn't see him like Urist could.

"Well, I've got an idea on how to get you all out of here. I've got my pick with me, and we could just dig a--"

Vanya interrupted gently, "We're not escaping. We aren't leaving, Hans."

Hans stopped talking for a long moment, and then said confusedly, "But... But what are you going to do then?"

Urist said, "We've got to get to Mr Frog's quarters. Vanya must get her bracelet back. It is very important."

Hans slitted his eyes suspiciously, "Now, I don't mind helpin' you folks, but I can't be havin' you hurt Mr Frog or anyone else. That's going too far."

Vanya sighed softly, "I don't want anyone dying. No one deserves to die here. I just have to destroy the bracelet. That's all, I promise."

Hans nodded slowly, saying, "Well, if you promise. I'll help you get to the bracelet, but its going to be really hard. There's soldiers everywhere upstairs. They're watching all the main hallways like hawks. Everyone is being searched, and there's a few squads down here searching for you."

Urist smiled grimly in the darkness, "They will be sorry if they catch us. I won't kill anyone, but I'm not going to pull my punches either, if it comes to violence."

Hans shrugged, "A broken nose heals. But don't you be hurtin' anyone, like I said. I won't stand for that."

Urist started to reply, then had an idea, "Hans, you were saying a moment ago that we could just dig our way to freedom. What if we had you dig a way, say, into one of the unused hallways around Mr Frog's room. Or maybe into a ventilation shaft?"

Hans smiled easily, "That'd be easy. I could get us real close like. We'd have to be quick though, mining is noisy work once you get going." He grimaced, "And it'd be terribly messy."

Vanya grinned impishly, "Oh, by the time we get my bracelet, a little mess will be the least of our worries."

Several hours later, Hans had a small tunnel that led into a ventilation shaft on the living quarters level. The three squeezed through the tiny hole, Hans first, Vanya in the middle, and Urist last. Vanya was nearly hyperventilating the whole time, but Hans kept up a quiet but easy commentary to help keep her calm.

Hans said, "Yep, this here gabbro is very stable. Hardly ever shifts on its own. We aren't in an earthquake area. No sir, this stuff ain't movin' any time soon. Plus, the way I dug it, this tunnel wouldn't be changed anyways. The shock would shift around it because of the shape of it, you see. I know a couple things about tunnels." He smiled to himself as they entered the shaft, and said, "See, we made it just fine."

Perfectly safe."

Vanya said, shakily, "Mmhmm. Let... Let me get into the hallway proper please. I just... I need some light."

Hans shifted the small grate easily with his prodigious strength, and let Vanya and Urist squeeze into the barely used hallway. Then he clambered out as well, and put the grate back into place.

Vanya was shivering gently, her eyes closed tightly. Urist was looking at her curiously. Finally, she opened her eyes and said, "I'm fine. I just... I just hate the dark, and tight spaces make it even worse. Let's go."

Urist nodded silently, and Hans shrugged easily. Hans said, "I ain't never met a dwarf what got scared of the dark before. Cain't you see in it too?" He paused for a second, then said again, "Why can't you see in the dark?"

Urist tensed up, and Vanya turned slowly toward Hans. Without a word, she grimaced and pulled down her hood, letting her ears show. Hans whistled softly, then said, "I ain't met no elves ever before. I thought you was a dwarfgirl this whole time. No wonder you don't like the dark, you lot are used to moonlight and such."

Urist relaxed fractionally, thankful that Hans was simple minded, or he surely would have thought Vanya was a spy. Vanya nodded at Hans and said, "I was raised as a dwarf, so I'm not really used to moonlight, but I don't see as well as you in the dark either."

Hans shrugged at her and said, "I think your ears are pretty. I wish mine were pointy like. Do you hear better than us?" His eyes widened, and he whispered, "Am I talking really loud to you? Like I was shouting? I'm sorry!"

Vanya giggled nervously, "No, you're fine. I don't think I really hear much better than you. We should get going though, we have little time."

Hans nodded, and they set off again. It was a relatively short walk to get outside Frog's door, thanks to Hans skill at finding a mine shaft near to the living quarters.

As they turned the final corner, Urist realized they'd made a serious mistake.

Outside Mr Frog's door was Mr Frog himself, with a smug grin on his face. At his back was a squad of soldiers, Fischer and Draigean amongst them.

The little group stopped dead in their tracks, frozen in fear.

Mr Frog said, "I told you, Fischer. She's very predictable. It was worth the wait to see the looks on their face." He frowned, "Is that one of your soldiers?"

Fischer growled, "Not any more. And that's that annoying little diplomat bastard. Boys, let's fuck 'em up." The soldiers advanced slowly past Mr Frog, weapons readied.

Vanya, Hans and Urist started to retrace their steps, but found another pair of soldiers around the corner, in a blocking pattern. Urist sighed, "I was hoping we could skip this part til we had the bracelet."

Hans grinned, "Not me. I like a good scrap." Urist didn't bother to explain the whole 'treason thing, instead nodding.

The two soldiers braced themselves as Urist and Hans sprinted at them. The two dwarves slammed into the stationary soldiers, Hans simply bowling the macedwarf before him over like a particularly odd shaped chair being knocked over, and Urist knocked the other back a step. Urist's foe swung his mace in a short arc at Urist's face, but Urist ducked, and drove into the dwarf's midsection, picking him up briefly, then slamming him on his back.

The stunned soldier braced his feet in Urist's stomach and kicked Urist off, trying to buy room. Meanwhile, Hans batted aside a feeble kick from the other macedwarf, and landed a single solid punch right in his face. The dwarf's head bounced off the floor roughly, and he was instantly knocked out.

Urist dashed at the prone soldier, but Hans got there first. Hans grabbed the warding leg and yanked. The dwarf flew across the hallway, and slammed into the wall

roughly. He wasn't unconscious, but he was definitely out of the fight for a moment. Urist beckoned, and Vanya sprinted with them out of the trap.

The squad of soldiers followed them closely, not so encumbered by armor this time, and with the element of surprise giving them significantly less distance to close. As the fugitives ran, Vanya gasped out, "I... Must get... My bracelet!"

Urist grimaced as they rounded a corner, and turned to face the oncoming soldiers. He said, "Vanya, remember our conversation earlier? About being brave? This is the time. You'll only get one chance."

Hans skidded to a stop, and returned to Urist. He was silent and grim, the adrenaline banishing all his thoughts of anything but combat. Vanya turned, torn and said in a tortured voice, "I can't do it without you."

Urist's grim face greeted her, "You must. This is my purpose. I have to buy you some time to find and destroy your bracelet. We can't run from them and do that at the same time. I have to keep their attention. And you have to go, right now."

Vanya opened her mouth, tried to summon some words, but instead, she turned and ran.

Urist and Hans stood braced in the hallway like the two soldiers had been earlier. The squad of dwarves rounded the corner, and stopped. Clearly they had expected to be pursuing, not being stood up to. Fischer smiled grimly, and then roared a battlecry. The squad charged.

Urist felt his beard spiking out crazily, and felt that familiar feel of time slowing to a crawl. He held his spearpoint in one hand, his stance loose and free. The hallway wasn't large enough for more than five or six dwarves to pass through easily, and there was ten in the squad. That meant all he and Hans had to do was hold back three dwarves each.

Three dwarves each, each dwarf more than a match for them in skill, equipment, momentum, and willingness to kill.

The squad reached the two lone dwarves, sheer momentum nearly crashing them into the fugitives. Urist sidestepped the first dwarf in line, his arm held out at neck level. The dwarf hit it at full tilt and flipped nearly completely over. Urist kicked him roughly in the head, hoping it would be enough to keep him down for a time, and grabbed the thrusting pike that was next in line.

He twisted and stepped, yanking the over long weapon from the dwarf's hand, and brought it down on his knee, breaking the head off. Urist dropped the two halves of the weapon. The closer dwarf of the two swung his axe in a wide, telegraphed arc. Urist didn't try to grab the weapon, as the dwarf obviously hoped, instead he punched the dwarf in the wrist hard enough to crack the bones.

The dwarf staggered back, and Urist faced the now pikeless dwarf that had tried to stab him, and Fischer.

Fischer didn't have her pike. But she was fully armored, and far faster than Urist still. She ducked as he punched at her, and drilled a fist into his side. He wheezed out all his air, and she stomped on his foot. He tried to swing again, but she pushed him before he could. Urist fell back, still anchored by that one foot. He landed heavily, and Fischer kicked him roughly in the knee. It cracked, and Urist gasped.

Urist fought past the overwhelming pain, and kicked with his other foot into Fischer's groin. She grunted, amused, and stepped off his other foot, practically inviting him to stand on his broken leg. Urist instead picked up the broken pike shaft and smashed it across her face. Fischer's look of consternation went through a metamorphosis into a rage-filled sneer, and she brutally kicked him in the side, cracking ribs.

Urist felt darkness nibbling at the edges of his vision, but he wasn't out of the fight just yet. As Fischer drew back for another kick, Urist stabbed her in the calf of her

supporting leg with his spearpoint. It flared, and sliced right through the adamantine leggings, burying itself deep into her leg. Fischer gasped, and staggered back. As she did, the other dwarf finally gained an opening, and pounced on Urist. Urist fell unconscious after the second punch crashed into his face.

HANSLANDA:

Fight Scene, Alternative Viewpoint

Hans stood beside Urist, standing loosely and unconcerned. He'd trained with these dwarves for a long time now, and he thought he knew their fighting styles well enough to make this fun. The first soldier in line held a short sword and a shield, and was dashing at Hans with the shield held up before him as a battering ram. Hans grinned to himself, and stood his ground. He twisted when the dwarf barged into him with the shield, deflecting its momentum off to the side, and Hans grabbed the dwarf's suddenly thrusting sword arm.

The thrust went wide as Hans stepped and lifted, locking the dwarf's elbow tightly. Hans held the dwarf easily with one hand as the next soldier stabbed at him brutally with his spear. Hans let the dwarf graze his flank with the spear, leaving a superficial wound, and kicked the soldier in the knee, shattering the knee cap. As the dwarf staggered, Hans flicked his wrist, and forced the still-armlocked dwarf to jump forward into the crippled soldier. The two fell in a heap, tangled limbs flailing.

Hans smiled peacefully as the third soldier and Draigneane came at him. Draigneane jabbed with his pike, dramatically roaring Hans' name as he did so. Hans sidestepped the jab, and punched Draigneane in the face. Draigneane staggered back, not wounded, but very concerned for his precious face. The other dwarf punched Hans in the face from the side, and stars exploded in Hans' vision.

Hans turned back to the dwarf slowly, and grinned at him. The soldier gaped a bit, and slammed his mace into Hans' stomach. Hans doubled over, and puked up his lunch on the floor unceremoniously. The soldier snarled and brought his mace around for another swing at the back of Hans' head. Hans barreled into him before he could, and slammed him into a wall forcefully. Once, then again. Ribs cracked under the heavy slams, and Hans dropped the brutalized dwarf. Draigneane had recovered from his worry over disfigurement, and tackled Hans face first into the wall he'd just beaten the other soldier down with.

Draigneane slipped his pike over Hans' throat, and locked his arms around it, squeezing the shaft tightly against Hans' throat, choking the larger dwarf. Hans fought through the growing haze in his vision to turn, lifting Draigneane bodily as he did. Another soldier was standing to the side of this battle of wills, and Hans dashed at him with Draigneane hanging on for dear life on his back. The three collided and collapsed in a pile on the floor, Draigneane still choking Hans. The other soldier was punching at both combatants furiously, and a third dwarven soldier came from further down the corridor to start aiming careful kicks at Hans.

Finally, the three soldiers realized the big dwarf was no longer fighting back, and stopped attacking him. Draigneane rolled the big dwarf off the trapped soldier underneath, and checked Hans' pulse. Still beating strong. Draigneane gave a half-hearted dashing smile and huffed, out of breath, "The... The only possible... Result when fighting the... Great Draigneane."

TALVIENO:

More From Vanya

You flip through the pages of the stolen journal, searching for another entry, but this next appears to be the final one in the series. It, as all the others are, is undated and unsigned, save for a tiny five-pointed star at the end, which you've come to believe is Vanya's self-chosen symbol.

When you're in the undesirable basement class, people are always looking to hunt you out like a common rat. In most fortresses there are small rewards for bringing us in, and during hard times, even other skulkers might turn against you for a bit of currency. As a result, if you trust everyone you meet, you invariably wind up as zombie food. When you're an elf on top of that, in a culture with racism so ingrained in them that they find elves unacceptable, it's hard to make yourself trust anyone at all.

That's all it really is, in the end. It's racism. Most dwarves are prejudiced against elves to such extremes that they believe themselves to be better in every way. But what if you're an elf raised in a dwarven culture? What if you're brought up to believe that your own kind are horrible, heartless, tree-hugging, flesh-eating monsters? I have the added problem of not even knowing anymore what parts of my memory are real.

It's hard enough when you can't trust or love anyone else, but *I* can't even love or trust *myself*... just because of who I am.

~~~

Urist and I continued onwards through the darkness, following the guiding light of Urist's magical spearhead. I'd heard of things like this happening in stories, but to see it happening firsthand was almost too much to believe, and with my crush by my side, I felt as if I was traveling in a dream.

Urist broke the silence hesitantly as we walked, his voice echoing through the caverns. "You know, Vanya... it is possible that Hans is only a trap."

I shook my head and brushed my hair out of my eyes, tucking it into my hood. "No, I know people. Hans is too honest and simple-minded to do something like that."

He looked at me curiously. "How are you so sure?"

"I'm a skulker... eventually you gain a sense of who can be trusted."

He nodded slowly, thinking. "All right. I will trust your judgment."

We soon reached the old malachite vein, and the spearpoint's glow faded to nothingness, leaving me once more in utter blackness as I felt about for Urist's sturdy form. He noticed and took my hand, and together we continued onwards. Suddenly I heard the soft stomp of shoed feet, and someone rumbled, "I'll ask ya kindly to say who you are, and don't ya take another step."

"Hans, it's only us," Urist replied in a low voice.

Hans breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, good, I was worried there. Well, I've got an idea to get you out of here. I've got my pick with me, and we could dig a -"

I interrupted him softly. "We're not leaving, Hans."

"We need to get to Mr Frog's quarters," my companion added.

Our benefactor sounded suspicious. "Now, I don't mind helpin' you folks, but I can't



be havin' you hurt Mr Frog - that's goin' too far."

I shook my head, hoping he could see the gesture in the dark. "I don't want to hurt anyone," I assured him. "I just need to get to my bracelet. It's important."

"Well..." Hans said, thinking it through, "so long as you mean it. I'll help you get to the bracelet, but it's going to be really hard. There's soldiers everywhere upstairs. They're watching all the main hallways like hawks. Everyone is being searched, and there's a few squads down here searching for you, too."

"They will be sorry if they catch us," I heard Urist say grimly beside me. "I won't kill anyone, but I will not pull my punches, either, if it comes to violence."

Hans seemed to agree. "It's true a broken nose heals. Come on, now, let's get you two back up there - follow me right quick."

"Wait, Hans," Urist said, pulling me after him. "You said a moment ago that we could dig our way to freedom... Could you dig into one of the unused hallways around Mr Frog's room, or perhaps a ventilation shaft?"

"That'd be easy - I could get us real close like. But ya'll need to know, mining is noisy work once you get going - they'll know we're comin'." I could almost imagine Hans grimacing as he added, "And I'm sorry, missus, but it'd be terribly messy."

I laughed softly and replied, "A little mess is the least of my worries."

Urist and I sat down in the darkness and waited for Hans to finish, talking occasionally to ease the monotony and break the silence. Urist seemed unwilling to relate many of his past adventures to me yet, nor did he seem overly eager to pry into my life, but he did make for good conversation, if you didn't mind doing a lot of the talking - and I didn't. It had been longer than I could remember since I had someone who would actually *listen* to me, and it wasn't *too* too long before I found myself relating much of my past to him, scooting closer to where he sat until we almost touched. Occasionally he would ask a question or respond to one of mine, but mostly, he just listened and let me talk. I like that about him - he's a true gentleman, and there are far, far too few of those remaining in the world these days.

It was several hours later before Hans returned, saying he'd finished the shaft. "Just follow close to me, now, hear?" he said, as Urist took my hand to lead me. When we reached the tiny tunnel, Hans continued on ahead, but Urist put me in the middle, saying he would be rearguard, just in case.

We started forwards, ducking to avoid the low ceiling, and I felt my old fears return: the walls were so close around me... almost as if they wanted to crush me between them, like the collapsing hallway we'd escaped earlier that night. I tried my best not to, but I began to hyperventilate, the sound of my breath joining the sounds of our shuffling feet echoing through the tunnel.

Hans seemed to guess at my fear and started talking. "Yep, this here gabbro is very stable. Hardly ever shifts on its own. We aren't in an earthquake area. No sir, this stuff ain't movin' any time soon. The way I dug it, this tunnel is perfectly safe in an earthquake anyways. I know a couple things about tunnels. I'm a good miner, don't worry."

Though I felt bad about how he thought I didn't trust his work, I was too scared to worry about it overmuch, trying not to whimper in fright.

Finally, finally, we made it to the end, leaving the freshly mined passage and entering a wide, open area.

"See?" Hans said, patting me roughly on the back. "We made it just fine. Perfectly safe, as I told ya."

I nodded shakily, shivering gently, my eyes closed tightly. "Mmm-hmm... I'm fine, I just... I just need some light."

I felt around frantically for my friends, and felt Urist's careful grip as he took my hand in his. "What is it?" he asked quietly, his voice seemingly amplified by the rock walls around us. "Are you all right?"

I swallowed and tried to calm myself as best I could, but it didn't help enough. "I'm fine," I managed after a moment. "I usually don't mind the dark, but I can't stand small spaces, and the dark makes it so much worse." They were quiet, and suddenly I realized they were likely staring at me curiously, and I blushed. "I'm fine, really," I attempted to reassure them, opening my eyes, though everything was still black as pitch. "Let's just go."

"I ain't never met a dwarf what got scared of the dark before," Hans intoned deeply. "Why cain't you see in the dark?"

I grimaced slightly and pulled down my hood, tucking my hair behind my pointed elven ears.

Hans whistled softly, and said, "I ain't never met no elf before... I thought you was a dwarfgirl this whole time. No wonder you don't like the dark none - you lot are used to moonlight and forests, ain't ya?"

He was stereotyping me, but at least he hadn't said something along the lines of "you'd better not think of eating me". Dwarves are generally taught that elves need to eat sentient creatures to survive... and that wouldn't have made for a very comfortable conversation. Still, he hadn't said it scornfully, and most dwarves would have.

"I was raised as a dwarf," I explained hesitantly, "so I don't care for moonlight much more than you do... but I still can't see in the dark."

Hans chuckled. "I think your ears are pretty. I wish mine were pointy-like." I giggled in spite of myself, and he continued in a whisper, "Wait, do you hear better than us? Was I talkin' really loud to you, like I was shouting? I'm so sorry!"

I actually laughed a little; in a way, his concern was cute. "No, you're fine," I said with a friendly smile. "I don't think I really hear much better than you do... but we really *should* get going, though."

So we set off again, Urist leading me. After a short while, we began to enter the torch-lit hallways of the fortress proper, and I began to recognize my surroundings again. I gave a sigh of relief. We were walking through the apartment level of the fortress, and Mr Frog's room was just around the corner ahead. But as we turned that final corner, I realized we'd made a serious mistake.

Standing idly outside his door was none other than Mr Frog himself, and standing behind him was a squad of the best Spearbreakers soldiers: Draigneau, Fischer, Feb, Jack Magnus, and Awl. As he saw us, a sly grin tugged at the corners of his lips. I seemed to notice before my newfound friends did, and I grabbed their hands, frantically trying to pull them back.

Mr Frog spoke to those behind him with a satisfied smile. "And here she is now. As I told you, Fischer, she's very predictable." Then he frowned, narrowing his eyes suspiciously. "Those two with her - aren't they your soldiers?"

"Not anymore," Fischer growled in her deep voice, pulling her pike from behind her and sending it into a rapid spin with the flick of her wrist. "Boys, let's fuck 'em up." The others in her squad readied their weapons, and she led the charge against us.

"Let's go - back to the tunnel," Urist commanded, turning and leading us back the way we came at a run. I'd had a good night's sleep, and though the sprinting came easy now, I was sure my legs would be sore the next morning.

As we turned the second corner, we almost smashed into a couple macedwarves, their weapons already drawn.

"I was hoping we could skip this part," Urist sighed.

Hans laughed jovially, a great grin on his face. "Aw, I love me a good scrap!" he roared, charging forwards almost joyfully. Urist followed him closely behind.

Hans threw his full weight against the macedwarf on the left, bowling him over and sending him sliding over the smoothed floor, his armor clinking. Urist's charge only knocked the other back a step, but he followed it up with a punch to the nose. His opponent heavily swung his mace, but Urist ducked to avoid it and rammed his shoulder into the macedwarf's stomach, picking him up by the arm and slamming him roughly on his back. At the same time, Hans punched the other in the head, knocking him out. The second macedwarf kicked Urist in the stomach as Hans rushed over and grabbed his leg, swinging him in a circle as if it was an Armokian Hammer-toss, and sending the poor soldier spinning into a wall, unconscious.

I watched in horror. What they were doing was considered traitorous, and it was all to protect *me*. Fischer would have them killed if she caught them.

Suddenly Urist caught my hand and almost pulled me over as he led the three of us out of the trap. "Faster!" he called out as we ran for our very lives, but it was useless: several large squads of soldiers emerged from a hallway far ahead of us and began to approach at a jog. With Fischer somewhere behind, and no side hallways in between, we were trapped.

Urist turned to me and grabbed my arms gently, looking into my eyes with a grim determination. "Vanya, you have to go *now*. You'll only get one chance."

I shook my head, tears pooling in my eyes as I looked into his. "I can't leave you," I whispered. "They'll kill you; I'll never see you again, and I only just found you!"

Urist shook me gently. "Vanya, you said I had a purpose, do you remember? *This* is my purpose - to buy you some time to do what you have to do. I owe you my life, and now I'm repaying the debt by saving yours."

I started to cry. "But you'll *die*!" I cried out in anguish. "You *can't* die!"

His jaw set. "You said wanted a purpose. This is it. Destroy your bracelet so Mr Frog will pardon you as you said he would, but be quick. Don't cry for me, Vanya. You gave me an extra year to my life, and without you I would already be dead."

I sniffed, trying to control my weeping. "I'll never forget you, Urist..." I whispered, as he and Hans turned from me and began to run towards the far corner.

"Follow closely!" Urist called out over his shoulder.

I ran forwards, blinking back the tears to keep my eyes from blurring. Ahead of us, Fischer's squad rounded the corner.

Hans roared and charged forwards, met with battlecries from the approaching dwarves.

"For Sarvesh!" Urist yelled, lowering his head like a bull and hurling himself courageously into the fray as soldiers stumbled backwards, stunned. Hans raised his huge fists and sent first one, then another legendary fighter sprawling on the floor. My eyes blurred with tears I was unable to keep back as I passed them, helplessly watching as Fischer pounded her mighty fist into Urist's side.

I turned the corner as the rest of the Spearbreakers army closed in, surrounding my two friends. I knew in my heart that they had no chance, and I swore I'd never forget Urist's bravery and unselfishness. If I ever bore a child... I'd name it after him.

I didn't have long to reflect, however. As I turned onto Mr Frog's hallway, I found myself toe to toe with five armored swordsdwarves, and I'd forgotten to cover my ears after showing them to Hans. "It's the elf!" one exclaimed with a growl, and they pulled their weapons.

I'm not sure how to explain what happened next. It all happened so quickly I didn't have time to think, or even understand what had saved my life.

As the first swung his blade out towards me, I found myself leaping forwards over their heads, springing off the leader's shoulders and landing a solid kick on the back of this head. They watched me in surprise as I flew through the air, landing firmly on my feet. They whirled to face me and struck out with their weapons, which glinted evilly in the torchlight.

It was all as though it was reflex - not a thought was going through my mind. I felt paralyzed with fright, but my arms seemed to move by themselves, parrying two of their weapons with my hands on the flats of their blades; positioning one of them to block the third. Time seemed to crawl, and I leaned backwards horizontally to dodge the fourth's wide arc, which whistled over my face as I caught another soldier beneath the jaw with my outstretched foot and sending him tumbling slowly away, cracking his head against a wall.

As I righted myself, a blade stabbed towards my chest like lightning. I leapt lightly into the air to avoid it, landing barefoot on its flat side and springing upwards over their heads again in a flip. They yelled in anger as they noticed their fallen comrade, but I, upside down and vertical above them, grabbed two of their heads with my hands and smacked them together with a strength I hadn't known I had.

I landed on my hands and one knee, and my eyes seemed to clear, everything returning to normal. I looked upwards in time to see two unconscious soldiers crumple to the ground.

The last soldier dropped his sword in shock at the sight of all his squad mates lying listless at his feet. He seemed about my age, somewhere around twenty, with a short beard and a handsome face. He looked at me as if I was an alien from another world, and held up his hands as if to ward me off as he began to slowly back away.

"Who... what *are* you?!?" he gasped, terror in his eyes.

Getting painfully to my feet, I took in what I'd done, my eyes widening in astonishment. "I'm... I'm sorry, I have no idea... I didn't mean to -"

"Stay away from me!" he yelled, retrieving his fallen sword and stumbling backwards. "Just stay away!"

I bit my lip, wanting desperately to apologize. I hadn't meant to hurt anyone. "I'm sorry!" I said again, taking a step closer. "Please, you have to understand, I don't know how I..." My efforts were useless - the young swordsdwarf turned and sprinted down the hallway, his boots clanging against the floor, jabbering almost madly about monsters in the fortress.

I brushed my hair out of my face, replacing my hood sadly as I knelt and checked for the pulses of the fallen soldiers.

But I *was* a monster - I knew that now. How else had I defeated five swordsmen in under a minute? How much else had I forgotten, how much else had Parasol erased from my mind?

I was relieved to find that I hadn't killed anyone, but I wasn't safe yet: behind me, I could hear the familiar stomp of metal boots as the entire Spearbreakers army approached where I sat. Standing quickly, I ran forwards towards my goal: Mr Frog's room.

I threw open the door in a haste, rushing inside and closing it fast and hoping that Fischer hadn't seen where I was.

"It's unusual for someone to put themselves into a trap they know exists," a deep, all-too-familiar voice spoke. It was Mr Frog, putting away some equipment and stepping out of the shadows. "...but it's even more unusual for someone without military training to take down five adept soldiers. How did you do that?" he asked curiously, removing his sawpike from a wall.

"You know I'm not a spy," I reminded him, trying to reassure him and buy myself some time. My eyes darted about the room, looking for my bracelet, but I didn't see it anywhere.

He switched his sawpike on, and the buzzing sound sounded newer, even sharper somehow. "But do I really know that, now? Perhaps my potion didn't work at all, and all you told me were lies." Mr Frog advanced slowly, cautiously, holding the spinning blade out far ahead of him. I began to back away to avoid what would be certain death at his hands.

"I didn't lie," I told him quietly. "I found out things after you left - things I hadn't known before. But where's my bracelet?"

Suddenly he leapt forwards with a mighty swing. I fell backwards and scooted away from him - once, twice, thrice he struck the spinning blade downwards towards me, and I only just barely managed to roll away from each stroke as it clanged against the floor, throwing sparks onto my arms and shredding the cloak Urist had given me. Finally I managed to get away, leaping to my feet and running to the other side of the room.

"Come, I know about your apparently extensive combat training now," Mr Frog said soothingly, trying to tempt me into attacking him. "You need not hide your abilities anymore. Strike me down - I have no training, no experience... only a weapon." He walked between the many tables, spinning his sawpike idly in his hands as he approached.

I prayed for something like the miracle of Urist's spearhead, or what had happened with the swordsdwarves outside Mr Frog's room, but nothing happened. "Mr Frog, I need you to listen to me - I need to tell you something important!"

"Then say it," he said simply, stabbing towards me with his blade.

I leapt backwards and smashed my back painfully into a table, barely ducking in time as the screaming weapon swung around a second time for my head. I crawled beneath the table and clambered to my feet on the other side. "*I need my bracelet!* I can't explain until I have it!" It was close, and I could tell - I could feel the old longing to keep it safe beginning to return. Suddenly, I didn't want to destroy it - I just wanted to take it and run far, far away. The gears in my mind seemed to shift, and I decided that that's what I'd do: I'd take my bracelet and run.

Mr Frog stopped, looking at me curiously as if I was on display under a magnifying glass. "Why did you always want your bracelet so...?" he asked, half to himself.

"You seem almost obsessed with it even now - what does it do that's so important? Does it open a portal to Ballpoint? Is that it?" As he spoke, he brought his weapon down towards my head so quickly that it grazed the back of my cloak and blouse as I leapt away, ripping apart the cloth. I started to hyperventilate again in fear, and tried my very best not to cry. I didn't answer him, but followed the strange, obsessive feeling my bracelet seemed to produce towards the other side of the room. Then I saw it - a familiar golden glint.

As I ran towards it, I heard Mr Frog's mocking voice behind me. "So you found it, did you? I'm sorry, but you're too late," he laughed, pulling a lever on the wall.

The room began to fill with a purplish gas, pouring in through the ceiling everywhere as if it didn't exist. I tried to take a deep breath and hold it, but I wasn't fast enough

- my throat began to burn, followed by my eyes and lungs. I choked, my chest convulsing sporadically, and as I tried to make my way to my little golden keepsake, pain seared my skin like magma.

"I designed this just for you, Vanya," Mr Frog said with a deep, overdramatic breath as he willingly filled his lungs with the poisoned air. "Ahhhh... To me, it smells like the best merlot from my private stocks, but to you... Well, at the moment, I doubt you even care."

The room began to swim, and I grew dizzy, stumbling forwards almost blindly towards the tiny glint of gold, my eyes beginning to twitch. I couldn't even force myself to breathe. "Mr Frog, stop!" I tried to bring myself to say, but my lips felt immobile and numb, my tongue swollen in my mouth. Suddenly I pitched forwards onto the ground as my legs seemed to turn to jelly.

"Shhhh, it will all be over soon," the scientist said as he approached, but in my ears, it sounded like the echo of the dead. Then I remembered Urist's sacrifice.

With a last desperate effort I reached the table, shakily pulling myself up the leg and grasping at my bracelet as the blackness began to encroach upon me, colors swirling in my mind. The last thing I remember was falling to the side, my bracelet shattering unnaturally against the floor, and the surprised yell of Mr Frog, sounding so, so distant. As everything dimmed, I remember thinking that if this was death, it was far more painful than I'd ever been told.



## TALVIENO:

### **More from V's Journals - A Deal with the Devil**

*The entry ends, and the pages afterwards are clean except for the jagged gash created by Mr Frog's mysterious weapon. The tale seems... unfinished, somehow. You reason, logically, that if Vanya had managed to write down the previous entry in her journal, she must've still been alive at the time of the writing, and therefore, Mr Frog's poison didn't kill her... though it certainly seemed like it could have from her description.*

*Setting the old journal aside, you sift through some of the other paperwork on the table - diagrams, schematics, blueprints, recipes for various drugs - and you finally find what you'd hoped to uncover. It's a dark-bound journal with a golden star emblazoned on the cover... a star with five points. Lifting it gently from the shifting parchments, you open it and begin to read.*

When you're a little child, you see everything in black and white: there are the good guys, and then there are the bad guys; there are the knights in shining armor, and then there are the evil dragons that only eat dwarven maidens. As you grow older, you begin to understand that the world is more complex than you'd ever realized... that there are gray areas that can't be called "good" or "evil", and deeds that cannot be called "right" or "wrong", but are somewhere in between. The complexity makes things more interesting, but it makes things more difficult as well. Still, eventually you lose sight of this grayscale perspective of the world, and you learn that amidst all this black, white, and gray, there are other areas... and you learn to see the world in true color. But it doesn't make things more beautiful... instead, it makes the world uglier and even more confusing. It's like when you don't want to hurt or anger someone by telling them you won't do something, but you don't want to do it, either:

it's not right, and it's not wrong, but neither is it neutral. You have only the best intentions, but no matter what you do, you end up causing harm; you try to be good, but you cause evil all the same. Life is like that sometimes.

I'd always thought of Mr Frog as pure evil... like the old dragons in the fairy tales. But if you think about it... the stories never showed the dragons from their own perspective: the last remnants of a dying race, alone in the world and trying desperately to survive, living far from civilization in an attempt to give themselves a chance. The knights always hunted them down, slaying every one of them, all because their weak stomachs couldn't handle anything but the softer flesh of a ruling-class female dwarf. The dragons weren't necessarily being *intentionally* cruel and wicked... it's more than possible they *loathed* what they were forced to do to survive. They just wanted to *live*... just as the princesses the knights in adamantite armor swore to protect did.

It occurs to me now that Mr Frog might not be evil at all, but neutral, and doing only what he believes he must. There might be ways to do things that would cause less damage, but he doesn't see them, or maybe doesn't care: he always takes the quickest path.

When I came to him, doing only what I believed I must to save my own life, I felt as though I was making a deal with the Devil. Unfortunately, it ended prematurely, with my lying limp and lifeless on the floor as I lost consciousness...

~~~

Later, I awoke, choking uselessly as it dawned on me that I was breathing - I was *alive*. Curiously, I opened my eyes and looked around.

I was lying on Mr Frog's bed, and he was sitting on a chair next to me, mixing something in a glass with some strange utensil. A cluster of empty syringes lay discarded on the lamp stand next to him, and my left arm felt oddly sore.

"Good, you're awake." Mr Frog said, handing me the glass he'd been stirring. "Drink this - you'll feel better."

I sat upright with an effort took it carefully in my hands. As I sipped at the liquid, I almost gagged. "It's so bitter!"

"That's irrelevant. Drink it," he ordered again, insensitively.

I did. Though I shuddered at the terrible taste and started to cough violently, I soon felt strength beginning to return to my sore muscles.

Mr Frog took the empty glass from my grasp and set it aside. "You weren't supposed to survive that gas poisoning. During the past few hours, I went out of my way to create several impromptu potion recipes just to keep you alive. You should be thankful."

"Thankful?!" I said in disbelief, still choking. "You almost killed me!" Finally I managed to stop coughing, slowing my breath to keep it from happening again.

"And I would have, too, had you not managed to reach your bracelet." His gaze drifted away, and he shook his head slowly as if disappointed with himself. "A whole year, and I never thought to look inside it - my tests showed the composition to be gold, and it weighed as much as I would have expected."

"Where is it now?" I asked, hoping he would show me. As much as I'd liked my bracelet, I wanted to see what had happened to it.

"Come and see."

Mr Frog had moved it to a table and arranged the pieces in a circular fashion, almost

like a puzzle. The shiny gold I remembered always having seen lay at the outside, scratched and shattered - but it was hardly more than a thin plating. Inside was another, darker metal, and nested within that was a strange green ring, etched with golden lines.

"What is it?" I asked in surprise, touching the otherworldly pieces. "Magic?"

"Of course not," Mr Frog scoffed. "The design doesn't even remotely resemble that of a magic-based system. Barring an extremely-clever disguise, this device is technological in nature. It's a circuit board, powered by electricity. The heat from your arm kept it charged and running, and the star-shaped charm contains a powerful compact transmitter. I haven't often seen work of this quality."

"Do you know what it does?"

"I have a few hypotheses..." Mr Frog said slowly, turning towards me with a raised eyebrow, "but somehow I feel that you already know."

I nodded cautiously. "I do... I'm pretty sure I do, anyway..."

I stepped away and watched him apprehensively, but he only nodded, turning his attention back to the shattered bracelet. "You'd best tell me, then." He leaned over and began tracing the golden lines on the circuit board with a hovering fingertip, muttering to himself.

I knew what I had to do, but I was terrified. I'd seen it firsthand when the room had filled with gas earlier. Then, suddenly, I remembered what Urist had said to me as we'd hid in Hans' room, hours before: *"Fear doesn't make you weak. Courage is doing something brave, even when you're scared. Being afraid keeps you sharp - it keeps you alive."* I needed to be courageous.

"No."

A thick silence filled the room after I spoke. After a minute, Mr Frog turned his head towards me, an expression of disdainful surprise on his face. "No? What do you mean, 'no'?" It clearly wasn't something he'd expected from me.

I swallowed uncomfortably, but pressed onwards, my voice quavering. "I mean 'no'. I won't tell you unless you promise to do a few things for me in return."

He rolled his eyes, turning back to the shattered device on the table. "You don't exactly have anything to ensure my cooperation, foolish girl."

"I have knowledge," I protested, stepping closer. "I know things you don't, and you want to know them."

Shaking his head, still focused on his work, Mr Frog replied, "Every scrap of knowledge your feeble mind contains could be revealed to me with a simple biochemical cocktail like the one you drank in the Spawn Research Center half a year ago. I only desired a quicker alternative, and that is asking you directly."

I had a hard time believing it had really been half a year, but pointed out, "I could refuse to drink it..."

He chuckled and turned to me. "Really? You? Tell me, Vanya, when was the last time you had a decent meal?"

My stomach seemed to twist as he reminded me of its emptiness. I didn't know what to say.

"I thought so," Mr Frog said smugly. "It's not always out of a lack of hospitality that we don't fatten up our occasional prisoner of war. Hunger is often a man's greatest weakness if he's not expecting any foul intent. But I'm curious - what is it you're wanting?"

"I want you to promise not to kill me, and to make Fischer let Hans and Urist go free..." I said carefully, though my hopes were already shattered. Then it hit me: I had no idea how long I'd been unconscious in Mr Frog's bedroom. "If they're still alive..." I added, biting my lip.

His response eased my mind in some ways. "They're still alive, but likely not for

long. Their execution by the Hammerer is scheduled for today, but that's in about an hour. You have until then to convince me that you have something you can offer me. You still know too much, you know, but I wanted to understand what task your bracelet was designed to accomplish. My questions were poorly worded when I spoke to you in your cell, I see now - what if you believed you weren't a spy, but a permanent fixture, for example, or an agent? You would be able to deny my accusations without as much as the slightest hesitation."

"But what if I can't manage to convince you?" I asked quietly. I feared I already knew the answer.

His response was what I'd expected. "I'm going to learn your bracelet's secrets one way or another, but, as you know things that can endanger my livelihood, and by extension, the fortress, I'm still bound by duty to terminate you... unless you can prove your value to me. The fate of your fellow conspirators is also at stake. So which will it be? Will you assist me, Vanya?" he asked, sitting down in his bedside chair and crossing his arms.

With a heavy sigh, I began to explain all I knew about how my bracelet came to be, relating my newfound memories of Wari and my trip to Parasol. He listened with interest, occasionally asking an inconsiderate question or suspiciously pointing out a possible inconsistency, but overall he remained silent. Talking to him tended to make you feel on edge... even when he *wasn't* trying to kill you.

Finally, I reached the end of my tale and searched his face for any signs of expression, but he kept his thoughts well-guarded as he pondered his newly gained knowledge, sitting motionless in his chair as I stood before him. After several minutes of silence, I decided to interrupt his thinking. "Is that enough?" I whispered, praying the answer would be "yes".

Unfortunately, the answer was a lot more long-winded than that. "What you've told me meshes with what I know very closely..." he said slowly. Then he stood, straightening and facing me. "I'm going to allow you into my confidence, Vanya, as it appears beneficial for us to work together in the foreseeable future."

"What?!" I burst out in surprise, louder than I'd intended. "Work together?! Why??" The last thing I'd wanted was to spend any more time with Mr Frog than I already had. I just wanted to be *me* again, the little skulker girl nobody noticed, and nobody knew was an elf. It had been over a year since I'd been "invisible", and I hated how everyone was always looking for me now. I just wanted to live my life in peace.

"Cease your interruptions and I'll explain," Mr Frog said in an annoyed tone. "I already knew about Wari's Parasol employment. She and I trade favors, and I allow her to remain in the Spearbreakers hospital so that we actually have a *real* doctor around, instead of a typical dwarven maniac. However, she'd neglected to tell me she'd ever captured you... Though I can't be certain your involvement was unwilling," here he narrowed his eyes at me, "she apparently had intended you as a fallback agent. I assume she discovered you in the hallways of the fortress and took you to Parasol directly, realizing your potential as a spy.

He stood and began pacing slowly back and forth, his brow furrowed in thought, speaking quickly as he fired out the information streaming through his mind. "Logic dictates that she couldn't have transported you to Parasol in plain sight, and nor could she have knocked you unconscious and carried you there, as it would've created a spectacle. I've often wondered where her transdimensional portal is... and she would've been forced to take you to its location while fully conscious, and erase the memory afterwards. Therefore, it's possible that I can retrieve the memory from your mind, and not only can we then uncover the location of her hidden portal, but

also know the exact coordinates of Parasol... which is again, how you can assist me. If you were actually a fallback agent, then you are officially an employee of Parasol, which means you can enter their base of operations unhindered. In addition, and intriguingly, the picture of Vanya Carena in Ballpoint's file closely matches your appearance at first glance. Though your last name is different, I might be able to pass you off as her and get you back into Ballpoint. Among other things... well, I have some data I need retrieved relating to my experiments, and this would be the perfect opportunity."

"My last name *is* Carena, but she's not me," I said quietly.

"Is that so? The design of your bracelet's circuit board imitates that often used by Ballpoint... I wonder if perhaps Parasol used you to create a duplicate 'spy' in Ballpoint... and therefore Ballpoint's Carena is actually a mole."

I shook my head. "No, she's actually working for Joseph."

Mr Frog stopped pacing abruptly. "Who?" He seemed confused.

"Joseph," I answered. "The one who helped you create an amnesiac for Talvi...?"

"I created Talvi's amnesiac..." he stated slowly, recalling the events. "As you already know, Talvi knew too much, and rather than kill her outright I decided to create a chemical mixture to reset certain memories in her mind."

"But it didn't work," I pointed out. Then the idea struck me: *maybe, somehow, Mr Frog didn't remember Joseph at all*. "Do you really think the second amnesiac you made would've worked any differently? Or would you have her killed inconspicuously... like in a cave in?" I asked him, recalling the conversation I'd overheard between Splint and Mr Frog in the dining hall.

He did a double take and looked at me, wide-eyed in bewildered surprise as he whispered, "Holy pitchblende... you're right." I smiled impishly, pleased with the abnormal reaction I'd gotten out of Mr Frog, as he continued, "I *couldn't* have created the second amnesiac... because..."

"...Because you didn't have the appropriate equipment," I finished for him, quoting what he'd told me before.

"Yes..." he agreed slowly, shaking his head to clear it and resuming his normal, calm expression. "Someone has altered my memories... Joseph, you say?"

I nodded in response.

"Who is this 'Joseph'?" he queried.

Mr Frog was looking at me curiously in a new light, and it seemed almost as if all of a sudden, he felt I was his equal. Though it felt admittedly good, I regretfully didn't have the time for it. "I *will* tell you," I promised him, "but first I need to save my friends. How much longer do I have before it's too late?"

"Right, right," he said absentmindedly, glancing at a small device on his wrist. "You have about five minutes left... You're going to need to hurry." Then he stood, walking over to a cabinet and removing a hooded cloak from a stack. "This is mine," he explained as he brought it over, "but you're going to need it to get through the hallways with the security presence as high as it is... It's possibly a bit long for you, but it will have to suffice. Put it on while I write out a letter of pardoning."

I put on the heavy cloak, pulling the oversized hood carefully over my ears and trying to adjust the rest so it wasn't so baggy. When I finished, Mr Frog handed me a sheet of parchment crossed with runes. "Go quickly to the barracks," he advised.

"Come directly back to me when you're done, and do not stray! If you do, I will know," he added gravely, tapping his temple. "I have eyes everywhere."

I nodded in response and hurried to the door, rushing into the hallway. I was on a mission again, but this time, it wasn't for the gods. No, this time... it was for Urist.

I sprinted through the corridors of the fortress as fast as I could, mindful of the huge cloak flapping behind me. Dwarves turned to look at me in surprise as I passed, muttering to themselves, but I kept my hood clutched tightly over my head with a free hand, and no one stopped me or took a second glance. I sprinted up the stairs, past the farms, and finally burst unceremoniously into the barracks, panting with exertion.

Urist and Hans were bound tightly in the center of the room, kneeling with their heads resting on a rough block of stone. What scared my heart into my throat was the fact that the black-hooded executioner, or Hammerer, as dwarves call it, had his weapon raised for the killing strike.

"Stop!" I yelled with as much force as I could, just as the Hammerer's swing came downwards towards Urist's head. My voice rung out through the huge, earth-walled room, and to my great relief, the Hammerer halted to see who'd given the order. A small crowd of dwarves sitting on hastily constructed chairs turned their heads in surprise, and Fischer stalked towards me from where she'd been overseeing the execution. "Explain yourself!" she said roughly, but then paused briefly as she realized who I was. "*You* again..." she growled with all the intimidation of a honey badger as she began to storm towards me, drawing her pike from where it hung behind her back. "This will be the last time."

I pulled out the little parchment Mr Frog had given me, waving it frantically in the air as she reached me. "Wait!" I cried out. "Mr Frog wanted me to bring this to you!" Scowling, Fischer lowered her weapon, snatched the paper out of my hand, and read it. She seemed rather unhappy about what it said, crumpling it up into a ball. "I hope you know what you're getting into, runt," she spat at me with an ill-intended smirk as she turned away. "Show's over, people, Mr Frog pardoned them. Weaver, release them!"

I breathed a sigh of relief as the crowd got up from their chairs and began to mill about, slowly working their way out of the room. Weaver, the executioner, slit the bonds of my two friends, and I rushed over to them, smiling brightly. It was the first thing that had ended well since Urist had rescued me.

"Urist! I'm so glad you're alive!" I exclaimed happily, as I threw my arms around him. But my feelings were mixed - on one hand, he was still alive... but on the other, he appeared to be in a lot worse of shape than when I'd first seen him.

"Be careful," he almost gasped in pain, loosening my arms. "Be a little gentler. I'm glad to see you, too."

Hans came up beside him, a head taller at least when they stood side by side. "Good ta see ya, missus," he said with a smile. "I thought we weren't comin' back from that scrape."

"I'm sorry, I came as fast as I could," I told them. "Are you both all right?"

"We are fine, Vanya," Urist assured me.

"V... call me 'V' when we're not alone," I whispered. I didn't want anyone else to know my name.

"All right. But why did Mr Frog order our release?"

I bit my lip. "I promised Mr Frog I would work for him if he let you go..." Neither of them responded, only staring at me in openmouthed surprise. It made me feel uncomfortable. "I didn't have any choice," I explained. "I couldn't let them kill either one of you."

Hans looked at me in pity. "When are you supposed start workin' for the dwarf, d'you know?"

My gaze dropped to the floor. "Right now..." I admitted quietly. Then I looked back at Urist. "But I wanted to spend some time with you, first..."

"Mr Frog ain't one to cross," Hans said, pursing his lips. "You need to get back there quick. Anyhow, I'll say it's been a wild time, but I gotta get back home. And thank you again, missus." With a respectful (but clumsy) nod, he turned and left. My heart sank at his words. The joy of knowing they were still alive was beginning to fade away, replaced with the sadness of not knowing when I'd see them next. But Urist only looked me over silently, an unfamiliar glint in his eyes... I wanted so badly to know what he was thinking, to know if he approved, but he kept his thoughts hidden from view. "Hans is right, V..." he said slowly, stroking his beard. "Mr Frog can be a dangerous dwarf when he feels like it, if the rumors can be believed... and we'd expected to die as we tried to save your life." With a sad smile tugging at my lips, I pushed him gently. "I *had* to rescue you, Urist. I couldn't let you die." "But to force yourself into Mr Frog's employment... why would you do that? You must have heard the stories too."

I looked up into his eyes. "Urist," I began, and stopped, his name lingering on my tongue.

Right then I wanted to tell him everything: how I cared about him, how my heart always leapt for joy within me whenever I felt his touch, how I loved talking to him and how his eyes were the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen... but all I could manage was the faintest whisper. "I *had* to."

He looked down at me, watching my face carefully. Finally, he slowly nodded. I wondered if somehow, he understood what I couldn't put into words. "Thank you, Vanya," he said quietly. "You've saved my life twice, and I won't ever forget that." "But what if I never see you again?" I asked, praying that I wouldn't cry in front of him. I felt my mouth twisting into a frown.

He shook his head. "Armok willing, you will," he said softly. "But thank you. You've given me new hope. My best wishes to you, V." Saying this, he kissed me lightly on the forehead and turned away, leaving me alone in the barracks as the scattered remnant of the crowd milled about the edges of the room. As I watched him go, stray tears trickled down my cheeks. Saying goodbye forever to the person I cared about, twice in one day, was far too much for me to handle gracefully.



HANSLANDA:

Fischer

Hans and Urist awoke inside the barracks, tied to chairs quite firmly. Hans was first awake, and he quietly hummed to himself for the few minutes it took Urist to wake up. Hans said, "You okay?"

Urist strained against the bonds a bit, but they were tied far too well. "I'm okay. My knee hurts and I'm a bit sore everywhere, but I'm alive. What about you, Hans?"

Hans shrugged, unconcerned, "Oh, I'm alright. Neck's a wee bit sore. Nothing too bothersome though. Wonder why the barracks is empty?" The last was said in a curious musing tone of voice.

Urist gritted his teeth grimly, "Promotes disorientation, allows the interrogator to make a suitable entrance, and allows us time to reveal precious information to anyone listening."

As he finished speaking, the door banged open, Fischer stormed in furiously and

said, "Bastard, weren't supposed to tell the half wit that." She punched Urist heavily in the face, and his chair fell over sideways, bouncing his head off the stone floor. A couple other militia dwarves came in behind Fischer and righted Urist's chair. Fischer said, "Why did you help the spy? You both were level-headed, good dwarves before these events."

Hans shrugged, "She's a nice lady." He received the butt of a sword in his stomach from one of the militiadwarves. Hans gasped for breath, and Fischer cussed at him for a few minutes.

Finally, her rage subsided, and she continued a bit more calmly, "We'll start with Urist. I never liked him much anyway." She grabbed Urist's chair and skidded him across the floor in front of Hans. Once in place facing Hans, she spitefully tipped the chair forward. Urist landed heavily on his face, and his nose started bleeding as the two dwarves righted him again. "I want to know why you helped that little rat-bitch."

Urist gritted his teeth and said nothing. Fischer waited an interminable amount of time behind him, silent and implacable. Finally, she stepped in front of him, and kicked his cracked knee from the side. Urist yelped in pain, and Fischer punched him in his nose. As the blood poured out of his face, she slapped him. Then again. She stopped for a moment, visibly controlling her rage with an iron will. When she finally calmed down again, she said, "You will not like it if I have to ask you again."

Hans glared at her from behind her back and said, "I use ta like ya, Miss Fischer. You was a good boss and a tough soldier. Now you're just being a bitch." Fischer turned and smiled sweetly at him for a moment.

Then she turned back and punched Urist viciously in the stomach. As he gasped in pain, she kneed him in the face, knocking his chair over for the third time. She turned back to Hans and punched him square in the nose. Hans took the blow grimly, and she punched him again. When the second punch didn't have an effect, she turned back to Urist.

Hans cried, "Wait!"

Silence reigned in the room, and Urist inwardly groaned. As bad as the beating was, now Fischer knew what their collective weakness was. Hans didn't want to see Urist hurt any more.

Fischer turned to Hans, and gestured at the two militiadwarves to pick up Urist and bring him close. She grabbed Urist's hair, and smiled once more at Hans. She said, "Do you have something you would like to tell me?"

Hans sighed, and looked at Urist. Urist shook his head, and received a brutal backhand for it. Hans grunted, and said, "No."

Fischer looked at him grimly, and asked, "No?"

"No." Hans said it adamantly.

The beating began. Fischer lifted Urist by his hair, and shook him. She dropped the chair and kicked it over to one side forcefully. Before it even finished bouncing, she was on Urist. She kicked him in the face, then the stomach. She stomped on the side of his knee before he could even register the first two attacks. Fischer paused for a second, letting the two dwarves right Urist again, then started calmly punching him. The face, the stomach, the nose, the ears, she kept it random, striking at a different target every time. Urist began to scream as she beat him viciously, and finally, after what seemed like an age, Hans cried out again, "Stop! I'll tell you! Just stop before you kill him!"

Urist wanted to reproach Hans, but he couldn't. He could only thank him mentally. Urist was in almost more pain than he'd ever been in before in his life, and none of the injuries was truly serious.

Fischer stalked in front of Hans, and said, "Are you sure this time? If you try to resist again, I *will kill him*. No amount of pleading will change that if you don't tell me

now."

Hans had tears in his eyes, but he said, "The little miss wanted her bracelet. It was important to her somehow. I don't know anything about no spying, that's all I know."

Fischer nodded, and turned to Urist. She said, "Urist. Look at me." She let him recover for a moment, then said, "Urist, if you don't tell me why you helped that little spy, why you betrayed all of us, then I will kill Hans. I will kill him more horribly than you can possibly imagine. I'll feed him to the spawn if I have to. TELL ME."

Urist wasn't crying but he was sobbing, "Okay... Okay. She saved my life. Before, in the Spawn Research Center. I owed her. And I wasn't going to let her rot in that dungeon with the spawn. I didn't know anything about any spying either."

Fischer grinned coldly, "And after you realized she was an *elf*... What then? Why did you keep helping her?"

Urist knew what was next, but he gritted his teeth and replied honestly, "I owed her. Elf or no elf. A debt of honor is a debt of honor." Fischer didn't beat him like before, but she socked him solidly in the mouth and then stomped on the foot she'd stomped on in their fight. Just enough to bring back the pain.

Fischer shook her head, almost amused at this point, "Well, I have what I need to know." She turned to one of the militia dwarves, "Awl, go to Mr Frog, tell him I know what I need to know. Then go to Splint and tell him to continue with the planned executions of these two. Noon today." She turned away from Urist and Hans, letting the other dwarf slide their chairs to their original positions, and stalked out of the room.

Urist asked the dwarf before he could leave, "What time is it? I'd like to know how long until I die."

The dwarf avoided Urist's eyes, and said, "It's the eleventh hour. You don't have any time left."

Urist and Hans sat in a sober silence for a long time, then Hans said, "I'm sorry I stopped her."

Urist laughed hysterically for a moment, then said, "It's okay, Hans. I thank you for that. I couldn't bear it any more. You did the right thing."

Time ticked away, far too fast for the two condemned.

Soon, dwarves filed in with chairs, setting them up on either side of the two chairs, facing Hans and Urist. Then, the Hammerer came in with two large stone blocks and set them in front of Hans and Urist on the floor. A squad of soldiers came in and untied the bonds on the two condemned's upper body and arms, and retied them to the stones. Once this was done, the soldiers took seats. Last to arrive was Fischer, and she took up a perch near the doors, leaning against the wall, a self-satisfied smile on her face.

The Hammerer, a dwarf named Weaver, unfurled a short scroll, and said, "By order of the current Overseer, Splint, soon to be baron of the mighty fortress Spearbreakers, the two dwarves before us are hereby deemed traitors to the dwarven nation. They have committed the highest crime, that of treason, of aiding and abetting an enemy spy, of assaulting the noble warriors of this fortress in mortal combat, and of casting shame on their clans. For these crimes, they are hereby sentenced to death by hammerstrike, to be carried out immediately by me, Weaver, Sanctioned Hammerer of Lokumokab. May Armok be pleased by the blood shed today." Weaver handed the scroll to a dwarf in the front row, and picked up his hammer.

Weaver raised his hammer high, held two handed, and brought it down viciously. "STOP!" An authoritative voice cried from the doorway. Weaver paused curiously, and turned to look at the mysterious cloaked figure in the doorway. All the dwarves turned, murmuring to themselves at this imposing figure.

Fischer started forward and said gruffly, "Explain yourself!" Her step faltered and her eyes widened slightly, then narrowed just as suddenly. She growled dangerously, "You again..." She grabbed her pike and stalked forwards, "This will be the last time."

Just as Fischer came into range of the suddenly much less imposing figure, the figure waved about a piece of parchment furiously and said, "Wait! Mr Frog wanted me to bring this to you!"

Fischer took the piece of paper roughly, and scanned it quickly. Her dangerous eyes flicked back up at the figure, and she spat out, "I hope you know what you getting into, runt." She turned to the crowd of curious dwarves and nearly snarled, "Show's over people. Mr Frog pardoned them. Weaver, release them."

Weaver set his hammer down, more than a little disappointed, and cut the ropes off the two dwarves. Urist and Hans stood up carefully, and gazed on their rescuer.

Vanya.

She nearly sprinted across the room, and threw her arms around Urist in a tight hug. "Urist, I'm so glad you're alive!" She said it so happily. Urist was stunned for a moment, then found himself returning the hug. He felt old emotions well up in his throat, and coldly shut it down before it could show. He couldn't shut down the pain from her tight hug.

The accumulated bruises and cuts from Fischer's violent beating ached throughout him, and Vanya's hug was pressing tightly on more than a few of them. Urist gasped out, "Be careful. Be a little gentler. I'm glad to see you too." The last was out of his mouth before he could stop it, and it was a tiny leak in his dam of self control.

Hans stepped a bit closer to the two of them and said, "Good ta see ya missus. I thought we weren't comin back from that scrape." His smile was a little forced, the events of the last few hours weighing heavily on his simple mind.

Vanya gushed, "I'm sorry, I came as fast as I could." She examined them both carefully, noting the bruises and cuts. "Are you both all right?"

Urist cut off Hans before Hans could say anything about the torture, "We are fine, Vanya."

Vanya went a little white and she furtively looked around the room, "V... Call me 'V' when we're not alone." She whispered, obviously hoping none of the lingering dwarves had heard.

Urist nodded, and said, "All right, but why did Mr Frog order our release?" He wanted to ask why Vanya wasn't dead, but he thought that would be a bit crass.

Vanya bit her lip and looked away as she said, "I promised Mr Frog I would work with him if he let you go..." She seemed ashamed.

Urist and Hans gaped at her openmouthed, neither able to speak. Hans wasn't able to speak because he couldn't quite understand how this had helped, and Urist because he was so overcome with admiration for her. Vanya continued somewhat ashamedly, "I didn't have any choice. I couldn't let them kill either one of you."

Hans looked at her pityingly, knowing full well Mr Frog's reputation, and said, "When are you supposed to start workin' for the dwarf, you know?"

Vanya gaze dropped to the floor, and she appeared to examine her shoes quite thoroughly as she said, "Right now..." She looked up at Urist, almost pleadingly, and said, "But I wanted to spend some time with you first..."

Urist almost choked up at this, but before he could speak, Hans said, "Mr Frog ain't one to cross. You better get back there quick." He looked away, a bit uncomfortable suddenly, "Anyhow, I'll say it's been a wild time, but I better get back home." He looked at her, and said almost fervently, "And thank you again, missus." Hans didn't wait for them to reply, he turned a left.

Urist looked over her, trying not to let his feelings show. If things had been different, he would have swept her up and kissed her. He would have poured out his

admiration. But things were not different. Instead, Urist stroked his beard and said, "Hans is right, V... Mr Frog can be a dangerous dwarf when he feels like it, if the rumors can be believed. And we'd expected to die as we tried to save your life." The last felt cruel to Urist, but he didn't want to get her hopes up just to crush them again immediately.

She smiled very sadly, and pushed him gently. She said, "I *had* to rescue you, Urist. I couldn't let you die."

Urist tried to ignore her soft hands pushing at him, and failed quite miserably, "But to force yourself into Mr Frog's employment... Why would you do that? You must have heard the stories too."

Vanya looked him square in the eyes, and her sad smile evaporated. Urist was suddenly struck by how beautiful her eyes were, and she said, very softly, "Urist." Urist loved how his name sounded in her voice. An ugly word, dagger, transformed by her lovely voice. Her next words were barely audible, the quietest whisper, "I *had* to." He looked her carefully in the eyes, his throat squeezed shut as if by a steel band. He felt what was radiating out from her, in her body language, the way she formed her words, the way she was looking at him.

She loved him.

Urist couldn't let himself falter. This was not meant to be. Mr Frog was going to take her from him within the next instant, as soon as this conversation was over. Urist could not tell her how he felt. For a long moment, he was silently forcing his emotions down. When he felt he could, he nodded, then spoke, and to his relief, there was no quaver of emotion in his voice, "Thank you, Vanya. You've saved my life twice now, and I won't ever forget that." He meant it, with every fiber of his being. He would dream of this beautiful elf maiden for the rest of his life, every single night.

Vanya looked down for a second, and her face was twisted gently, sadly into a frown. She said, "But what if I never see you again?"

Urist softly said, "Armok willing, you will. But thank you. You've given me new hope. My best wishes to you, V." He wanted to say more, to say her full name again, to say anything more. Instead, he kissed her gently on the forehead, eyes desperately screwed shut so she wouldn't see the tears building, and turned away. He walked out of the room, brushing roughly through the milling crowd, and into the hallway. Once out of the room, the tears flowed freely down his cheeks. For the first time since his wife had left him, Urist cried tears of grief. He staggered through the fortress in a haze, when Hans swept up beside him and grabbed his forearm gently. Hans gently tugged Urist along, quietly saying, "Urist, it's okay. C'mon Urist, let's go get you a drink. It's okay."

That night, Urist cried himself to sleep.

TALVIENO:

V's Journal, Entry 15

This is the second entry of V's third journal. Her script is more flowing than it's been in the past, as if this time she was using a finer-quality pencil to write with.

However, the narration appears to be different than her typical style at first, which is unusual for her. You read onward all the same.

A young woman walked through the halls of the fortress, seemingly oblivious to the chaos swirling around her. Dwarves passed by, pushing giant wheelbarrows at a jog;

others stumbled along carrying heavy wooden bins filled to the brim with all manner of items. Young children played tag, rushing past and enjoying their few years of childhood as well as the military fortress could allow.

The woman noticed none of these, her dark hood overshadowing her face like a clouded storm. Even so, she walked with a purpose, just like all the other dwarves, her feet padding noiselessly against the cold stone of the corridors as she made her way onwards at a brisk pace towards the deeper apartment levels.

She'd heard, of course, the recent news. The hallways were always abuzz with the chatter of passing friends, and it wasn't hard to listen in. The zombies were dead, and the necromancers slain. The common consensus was that it was ample cause for celebration, and Splint himself (the newly-appointed overseer, taking his second term) had lately organized the greatest party the fortress had ever seen in its young life. Even those of the basement class were happy: for some unknown reason, possibly in light of recent events, Splint had mandated the carving of a "skulker barracks", where even the homeless would finally have a home. Everyone appreciated this, especially the upper class dwarves, who were glad that they wouldn't have to look at them anymore.

However, the young woman didn't share their mirth. She saw no cause for celebration. She walked with downcast head, her cloak clutched tightly about her. Though her pace was brisk, her step was heavy. She'd lost a person she held very dear, and she felt that no blessed ray of sunlight could ever pierce her veil of sorrow. If one had cared to look closely, they might have noted a slender finger brushing a tear from her cheek, or perhaps seen two oddly shaped ears faintly outlined in the fabric of her oversized hood.

The young woman walking through the hallways of Spearbreakers was none other but me, and I was beginning a new life in the employment of my former enemy.

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Reaching Mr Frog's door, I hesitated, wiping away what remained of my tears and steeling myself against my indecision before I finally turned the knob and entered.

"Welcome back," intoned the cold, unwelcoming voice of Mr Frog. "You're late."

"I came as quickly as I could," I said quietly, aware of the fact that my voice quavered from my recent weeping.

He stood across the room, bending over my shattered bracelet on the table and tapping it with what seemed to be red and black pencils with long metal tips, as he read some sort of display on a small box beside him. He straightened, putting aside his equipment. "Not quickly enough," he answered, leaning against the table and regarding me with an amused expression. If he noticed my moist eyelashes, he made no signs of acknowledgement. "I told you I have eyes everywhere, did I not?" "Several times." I was beginning to wonder what he meant by that. I suppose I ought to have noticed the first time he said it, as I ran from him towards the old garbage dump to hide. The garbage dump has been reopened, as I understand it... possibly due to his warning that it was an excellent hiding ground to thieves. It might also have been partially because we needed somewhere to dump the thousands of bones that lay piled in the blood plains aboveground.

Mr Frog approached and held out his hand, scattering my thoughts to the wind as I pulled myself back to the present. "I'll need that cloak back now."

I slipped out of it and handed it to him, shivering as the cold air of the room caressed the bare skin of my back where my blouse had been ripped apart.

Mr Frog seemed to notice my discomfort. "You'll need better apparel, obviously..." he said with a grimace as he turned away to store the cloak in his cabinet. "However, the improvability of your wardrobe is a relatively unimportant matter, and can be postponed. You've much studying to do, if you're going to be my assistant, and it would be most efficient if you began immediately." Saying this, he walked to a nearby desk and bent down to press a button on a silvery box that sat beneath it. A rectangle of light lit up the top of the desk.

I caught my breath and walked towards it. "A computer," I guessed, awestruck. "Isn't it?"

He nodded, moving past me and gathering several glass utensils from a table. "Excellent. You aren't as illiterate as your appearance would imply." From Mr Frog, it was a compliment. "It's a desktop computer, created by myself using a conglomeration of technology from several distinct sources. Unlike its unwieldy predecessors, my model's control surface and display alike are the flat surface of a desk, and therefore, its functioning's efficiency is increased." He was working quickly as he spoke, and though I grasped little of what he said, I got the impression that it was something he was proud of. "Just begin reading," he ordered. "If you see an article you want to read, tap the screen where it is. Nothing is counter-intuitive, and it should be sufficiently idiot-proof, even for you."

I glanced back at him with narrowed eyes at the insult.

"No offense, of course," he said, leaning out from behind his tall glassware apparatuses with a sardonic smile.

Turning back, I looked at the desktop. "The Fundamentals of Real Life," read the top of the display in large bold runes. Curiously, I held my hand hovering above it, and lowered it slowly. The lighting of the display neither dimmed nor disappeared, even when my fingertips touched the surface of the desk. Pressing gently with two fingers, I pushed away from me, and watched in fascination as "The Fundamentals of Real Life" scrolled upwards and out of view past the top of the rectangle of light. It felt amazing to be interacting with it - to watch it do what I wanted it to. It wasn't magic; it was technology... and it was wonderful.

I knelt beside the desk and looked over the silver box that sat on the floor beneath the desk. It was humming quietly, as if there was something whirring about inside. There were clear panels on the side that might've been possible to remove, but at that particular moment, I wasn't interested in the computer's inner workings. I was more interested in the odd slots on the front.

Two of them seemed to match Talvi's key almost exactly in size and distance apart.

Tremblingly anxiously, I got out the little envelope that Talvi had given me, now badly worn, and so, so carefully dumped the contents into my hand. I looked over the little key I'd carried about. It had two metal bits that were hollow, lined inside with strips of gold... I'd noticed it before, but hadn't really ever given much thought to it...

I'd carried a piece of a computer with me for over a year and had never even realized.

Eagerly, apprehensively, I fit the teeth of the little key into the slots on the front of Mr Frog's computer and caught my breath as they slid into place perfectly.

"Hello, and welcome," spoke a voice. I stood suddenly, my heart pounding, my eyes widening as I saw a human face clearly visible on the desktop. As I came into view, it seemed to turn its eyes and look straight at me, though it was only a flat picture. "Damn it, what have you done?" groaned an exasperated Mr Frog, putting down his flasks and starting towards me. "You just sat down, and you've already found a way to create complications, have you?"

The computer spoke again. "Voice pattern of 'Mr Frog' recognized. Retrieving data... You have no new AI Messages."

I looked at Mr Frog and back to the desk, then back again. "I..." I stuttered, "I just... I didn't know, I thought... I just -"

The scientist noticed the key inserted in the front of the machine, and abruptly slowed to a halt. "An Identity Drive..." he spoke slowly, tilting his head as he gave me a puzzled look. "How did you manage to come across one of those? I only ever had one of them, and I lost it five years ago..." While he spoke this last, his eyes widened gradually as realization began to spread across his face. He hurried past me to the desk, tapping the glowing screen in several places. Then, in a clear voice, "Disclose message content, non-administrative users."

"Message One; User 'Talvi Diamondknight'; Recipient 'Splint'; Subject 'Joseph'," rang the strange voice, echoing slightly against the stone walls of the room. It sounded artificial somehow.

Mr Frog turned to me with an expression of astonishment. "You've kept this for how long?"

"Over a year..." I whispered, worried he might burst out angrily at any moment. He only shook his head slowly, his gaze idling away from me. "Every record I have of this 'Joseph' is gone - I did a search while you were rescuing your friends... All I can assume is that whoever he is, he managed to wipe everything I had on him clean..." He turned back, his eyes sparkling with the eager delight of a scientist making a breakthrough, an intruding smile breaking across his typically neutral facade. "And you managed to keep one piece, one potentially important piece... You kept it safe. But this is wonderful!" The smile faded as he turned back to the desk, but the sparkle in his eyes remained. "Open message one, deactivate voice identity recognition, override user privileges," he commanded the computer, leaning over the display.

The face disappeared, replaced with another: that of my old friend, Talvi.

"Splint, is that you?" Talvi asked hesitantly, looking forwards blankly.

"Yes it is," Mr Frog responded. "What do you need to tell me, Talvi?" He turned to me briefly and whispered as an aside, "This computer isn't equipped with a camera," as if it explained everything.

"Well, Splint," Talvi continued in her familiar accent, "I've been wantin' to tell ya' for... *Ever* so long, now... There's somebody real scary-like tryin' t' mess stuffs up - I jus' thought you oughta know... He said he's gonna try t'destroy the fortress."

"All right, Talvi," Mr Frog said calmly. "Who is it?"

"Well, I don't rightly know his last name, but his first one is 'Joseph'... You do believe me, don't you, Mr. Splint? I know it's not somethin' you'd be all likely to believe and such, but I don't want my cavies killed anymore'n you want Spearbreakers to fall..." The image of her face flickered briefly, as if she had looked to the side and back in a split second.

"I believe you, Talvi," he answered reassuringly. "Tell me everything you know about Joseph."

"Okay..." she began carefully. "I met Joseph a while back - he was in Mr Frog's room an' he wanted me to take him wit' me... So I did... But he's wanted me t'*do* things, Mr. Splint - things I rightly know I oughtn't should! He was my friend at first, talkin' to me and tellin' me things that were goin' on outside... He said he had eyes everywhere."

I glanced at Mr Frog briefly, wondering again what exactly that phrase meant.

Talvi's face flickered a few more times and continued. "It did *seem* like he could see ever'thing an' all, but after a tad I found out there was a lot of places he couldn't see

none. But then he wanted me to steal stuff from Mr Frog's room, and he told me how much Mr Frog cared about me and how Mr Frog wanted to be with me and how much Mr Frog thought I was purty an' such..."

Mr Frog gave a snort of something vaguely akin to laughter.

"But none of it were true! Mr Frog don't love me none, sure's anything. He hit me a few weeks back, even, so I knows he ain't all Joseph said he were... but anyhow... He wanted me to steal stuff from Mr Frog's room, an' he wanted to know about our 'security' and how many cameras Mr Frog had up. I know Mr Frog has cameras up an' all, but I don't know how many, and I weren't gonna tell Joseph nohow..."

"What's a camera?" I interrupted quietly, stepping closer to Mr Frog.

He appeared as if he was about to answer, but Talvi answered for him. "They're a lil magic thing you kin look through t' see anything you want without e'en havin' to be there. I thought you might ask, Splint. It helps Mr Frog know all that's goin' on, an' he *does* have them everywhere, not like Joseph."

Mr Frog glared at me, grumbling under his breath that I shouldn't speak.

"Anyhow," Talvi's image continued, her posture shifting in an instant, "Joseph got mean when he figur'd out I weren't gonna help him. He started threat'nin' to destroy th' whole fortress, and kill my cavies if I didn't help. He said we weren't of any importance rather than location, or somethin'... And then he said -"

"Talvi..." Mr Frog said, interrupting her.

Her image flickered again and she stopped mid-word. "Splint?"

"Do you know who Joseph works for? Or who he is?"

She shook her head. "I ain't even all too sure he's e'en a person. I think he might'n be jus' like Mr Frog's messages on this little key, an' just a picture that talks to you. Mr Frog's messages don't do anything but yell at me to give 'is stuff back, though." Mr Frog chuckled, scratching his beard thoughtfully. "But who does he work for?"

"He don't work for nobody," Talvi said, her image disappearing for a second. "He says he's got a place called 'Eris', thass all I know 'bout that. I's got a friend who he once said looks like somebody at another fortress: 'Ballpoint'... Is V there, Mr. Splint?"

Glancing at me curiously, Mr Frog answered her, "Yes she is, Talvi - why do you ask?"

"Joseph saw V once, he did, an' he wanted to know who she were. He wouldn't talk to me much o' none after that... But he did say she looks jus' like somebody o'er there that works for 'im. A 'mole' he said, but I'll tell you sure as a splinter's needle cain't sew cloth outta mushrooms, I's seen her myself, and she don't look a thing like moles. Too big, anyhow, but she does look a lot like V..."

Mr Frog remained silent for a moment, and the only sound in the room was the computer's soft hum and the occasional static sound of Talvi's flickering image. "Can you show me what Joseph looks like?"

Talvi disappeared, replaced with a still image of the man I'd come to fear more than even Mr Frog himself: Joseph.

"That's him," I whispered, taking a step closer and pointing. "That's Joseph - Talvi's right. You used to talk to him. I actually saw you make a deal with him. He said he wanted the promise of a favor in exchange for the amnesiac that I injected into Talvi."

"Did he now..." Mr Frog mused. "Interesting... Talvi, do you have a picture of V?"

"I took one once," Talvi replied as Joseph's picture disappeared, only to be replaced with one of myself, wearing the old, ragged hat I wore before I found my beanie. I was shocked that she had a picture of me. I could even see the bottom of my ear in it, it was so clear.

"Excellent," said Mr Frog. "Do you have a picture of the mole?"

My face disappeared from the glowing display, and Talvi's resumed its original

position. "I have a little bit of one." Talvi's face disappeared and the face of Carena appeared on the screen, blurry and hard to see. The viewpoint was from inside the little cavy tunnel. I hadn't noticed it before, but Carena's face *did* look unnervingly similar to mine. It looked so close that I couldn't help but think that it might almost be more than just a coincidence.

"Did Joseph ever tell you where Eris is located?"

"I know more, but I'll have t'tell you in person."

Mr Frog furrowed his brow momentarily. "Do you know if Joseph ever came to Spearbreakers?"

"I know more, but I'll have t'tell you in person," she repeated with the same intonations. Mr Frog only grimaced.

"Has the mole ever visited Spearbreakers?" he asked.

Talvi nodded in response. "Yes."

"Has the mole ever been to Eris?"

"I know more, but I'll have t'tell you in person," Talvi's flickering image said once more.

Mr Frog stepped back from the desk and spoke quietly in disappointment. "That's about all we're going to get out of this file. I possibly shouldn't have accepted that amnesiac as you say I did, she knew a lot of things I'd really like to know. It's likely all gone now." Then, louder, "Computer, close message, exit program." Talvi's face disappeared abruptly, replaced with the text, "The Fundamentals of Real Life".

Beside me, Mr Frog scratched his beard thoughtfully. "It would appear," he stated slowly, "that you're already beginning to prove your worth as my employee..."

"Thank you," I whispered. "So you're not mad at me?"

He jumped as if startled out of his thoughts. "No, not at all, not at all. In fact, it would appear we're going to have to hasten your training. I'll need time to plan, but I think I'm going to be sending you to Ballpoint. You look so similar to Talvi's mole that you ought to be able to successfully impersonate her."

My eyes widened, partially in fear. "I'm going to Ballpoint *alone*? I don't even know what it is!" I didn't want to be forced into spywork, as it seemed he wanted.

Mr Frog grunted and returned to his work over at the apparatus-covered tables. "It's a company. They're interdimensional time travelers, just like Parasol. Their technology development level is advanced beyond anything you dwarves – or elves, rather – currently possess." Saying this, he finished stirring a flask and brought it over to me, picking up a book from another table on his way. "I'll need you to drink this - perhaps we can uncover some more of your lost memories with it."

"Will it be bitter?" I asked cautiously, taking it in my hands.

He scoffed, "Bitter? Does taste really matter so much to you?"

I hesitated for a moment and nodded, frowning a little bit as he glared at me derisively.

"Hrmph... fine," he said finally, handing me the book and taking the flask back.

I looked it over in my hands, turning it and gently opening its parchment pages to look within. It was a beautiful journal with a leather-bound hard cover - and in the center of the front cover was a golden outline of a five-pointed star. I tilted it, catching the torchlight and sending a reflection dancing across the room. I smiled brightly with pleasure - it was the first gift I'd received in years, it was gorgeous, and best of all, it was *all mine*.

"I had it made for you earlier, express order," Mr Frog explained as he returned with a tall glass. "I figured you were going to need something a little better than that blood-spattered thing you've been using, and I have your original one here

somewhere... But here you are. Drink this; you may find it more to your taste." I switched the book to my left hand and took the glass, drinking it carefully. It tasted of roses and sweet-scented petals, as if he had somehow collected fields upon fields of wildflowers and somehow put them all into a little glass. I'd never heard of such a thing being done before; it was unusual, but delicious all the same.

"How did you do that?" I gasped once I had finished, wishing there had been a little more, and that I hadn't drank it so quickly.

"How did I do what?" he asked unconcernedly as he took the glass from my grasp and walked away. "But it doesn't matter. I'll provide you with better apparel in the morning. In the meantime, you'd best get some sleep, Vanya." He pushed a button on a column. I jumped back in surprise as the shale wall to my right seemed to split and pull away from itself, revealing a doorway through which I could see a little wooden bed.

*I was going to have my own room.* I almost cried in happiness, clapping my hands to my mouth - Mr Frog may have been evil in nature, taking skulkers from their homes and performing experiments on them, but his show of hospitality far outmatched that of Fischer. A real journal, a room, a bed and new clothes were luxuries I'd only dreamed of the past eight years.

"I hope you don't mind the fact that the bed is made of wood," he smirked, wiping out the glass I'd used with a cloth and starting on the others he'd used. "It's my guest room, and usually, my guests don't mind."

"Not at all," I breathed in wonderment, putting one foot ahead of the other as I seemed to glide forwards almost in a dream. "It's perfect..."

I sat down on the edge of the fur mattress, testing it gently, and finally threw myself onto it with a little laugh of joy, feeling myself sink into the soft folds. It felt wonderful compared to sleeping in the hallways with a ragged blanket, and especially compared to the cold stone of a shelf in a makeshift prison cell.

That night, I smiled myself to sleep, tucked cozily in a warm bed for the first time since I was twelve. The terrors and tragedies of the day were all but forgotten, though in my dreams I thought I saw the face of Urist...  
He was crying.



## MR FROG:

Mr Frog hunched over the counter in his workspace, gazing into a dish through a microscope and analyzing tissue samples from the new strain of Spawn he was developing. He dripped a few drops of clear liquid from an unmarked container into the dish, and felt a wave of dark triumph upon witnessing the cells' reaction. The hidden aversion to acids had taken like a flea to a dog. Even if the worst-case scenario came to pass and the new Spawn were deployed against the worlds, exposure to household vinegar or even most fruit juices would cause their tissues to denature and the Spawn to, if not die, then at least permanently cease functioning. Perfect.

Mr Frog heard the door open; he glanced over, and was unsurprised and mildly-annoyed to see Silena skipping into the room. The nitwit had somehow gotten it into

her head that she was Mr Frog's personal assistant, a misconception that no amount of angry protests on Mr Frog's part seemed to be able to correct. Mr Frog was deeply offended by the implication that he needed any sort of assistance at all, let alone from a dim-witted woman ([what] was she, exactly? There were many sapient species in the multiverse, too many for any one person to track, and Mr Frog didn't know for sure what exactly Silena was supposed to be) such as Silena. Mr Frog would be willing to believe that Silena had legitimately earned her bioengineering credentials just as soon as he saw her do something impressive besides clean up his lab for him without being asked to do so.

Silena walked up beside Mr Frog, looking down at the dish. "What are you working on?" she asked conversationally.

Mr Frog straightened up and gave Silena a sideways glance, irritated at the pointless interruption. He ignored her question and bent back down. A Spawn screeched loudly in the containment cells, causing Silena to jump. Mr Frog smirked.

A few hours later, Mr Frog was dissecting the preserved cadaver of a blue earth pony with increasing interest when a light lit up on the corner of the counter, accompanied by a soft electronic beep. Mr Frog straightened up, frowning. It was time. He looked over at Silena contemplatively; he may as well try to wring some useful result out of the mess.

"Follow me, Silena," said Mr Frog casually; she looked at him and smiled inquisitively, and Mr Frog continued: "I have something that requires your attention." Silena nodded complacently; her smile faltered momentarily when she saw Mr Frog heading towards the containment sector, but quickly reasserted itself as she followed behind him.

The two came to a stop in front of one of the cells containing a dwarf. Silena gazed at the dwarf through the display monitor, visibly-upset. The dwarf was pacing around aimlessly, clearly-unhinged.

"Keep waiting," said Mr Frog grimly; "If I'm right -- and I always am -- you'll see it in just a few minutes."

Silena looked at the dwarf uneasily, unsure what she was supposed to see.

A few minutes passed, after which the dwarf suddenly shuddered, then dropped to the ground writhing in agony. Silena's eyes went wide, a cold sweat appearing on her delicately-jawed face. What was happening to the dwarf? she wondered.

Mr Frog, for his part, already knew the answer to this question, which was why he looked away. It appeared that the accelerated viral transformation had taken perfectly, in any case.

A familiar shriek erupted from the dwarf's throat, making Silena's insides turn cold. A massive gash abruptly tore open in the dwarf's chest seemingly on its own, spraying blood everywhere; Silena began screaming as the gash spread up the dwarf's neck, cleaving his jaw in two. The dwarf's arms began to simultaneously elongate and wither away, the flesh shriveling, turning black, and sloughing off in large chunks, leaving behind freakishly-long bones bound with thin strips of muscle and tendons. Jagged teeth erupted from the edges of the gash in the dwarf's torso; Silena could see the dwarf's innards through the gash; they appeared to be turning gray and shriveling away, and a fiery red glow shone through the lungs where the heart should have been. Black smoke began pouring out of the gash. The... [thing] continued shrieking out of what was unmistakably pain. It was too much for Silena; she sank to her knees, her screams mixed with sobs.

"W-w-why!?" sobbed Silena; it was the only coherent thought she could form. After a few seconds, she gathered her thoughts and looked up at Mr Frog, shaking with rage. "What did you do to him!?" she yelled, hot tears streaming down her face; "How could you do that to someone!?"

Mr Frog took a swig from his flask to calm his nerves; watching a dwarf turn was upsetting. "I exposed him to the bite of an altered Spawn," he said evenly; "I did it because that's what Joseph deems necessary in order for him to gain power."

Silena's mouth moved soundlessly; her face went blank as Mr Frog's words sank in. Joseph did this. Mr Frog felt a fresh wave of triumph; he had hammered Joseph right in his weakest point -- his minions' loyalty.

"I'm just doing what Joseph instructed me to," said Mr Frog, choosing his words carefully; "Direct your anger at him, not me."

Silena looked at Mr Frog fearfully; "I have no problem with Joseph," she said quickly, obviously-lying. She paused; "Why did you want me to see that?" she asked, suspicious.

"I wanted to see what your reaction would be," stated Mr Frog. Silena's blood ran cold; was this some type of loyalty test?

Mr Frog turned and walked back towards the laboratory. He'd make Silena his pawn eventually, he was sure of it; he just needed to wear her down some more.

[[Talvieno's note: Included because it contains a quote that was voted into the second post (the post that had all the Spearbreakers links).]]

**(Mr Frog):** E: Hansie super-ninja'd me :V Didn't even tell me he'd posted.

**(Hanslanda):** Wow, Spearbreakers is so ninja we ninja'd the internet itself.

## **SPLINT:**

### **5th Slate, 207.**

Draigneane, while an unparalleled master in narcissism and general combat, has finally been deemed worthy of being called a pikemaster.

**'Draigneane' Kisezih Bedoputi Nebo has become a Pikemaster.**

### **6th Slate, 206.**

I decided to peruse some of our engravings, well way from the hospital (though I've ordered it smoothed out so it looks less, you know, depressing.)

I personally found the one of the kobold smashing into something hilarious.

### **17th Slate, 207.**

Seems ThatAussieGuy informs me if anyone touches his crossbow "I'll (he'll) tear their arms off and beat them to death with them."

**'ThatAussieGuy' Eshtânnicat, Fortress Guard has grown attached to a iron crossbow!**

That's what I get for accepting someone named after a maddwarf into my fortress. At least his is made of actual metal...

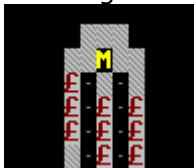
### **20th Slate, 207.**

Mr Frog made a grievance about the bones and such littering the place while he went out to collect samples from the remains of the barbarians and spawn. Says he's studying the effects of undeath upon their corrupted flesh or some such nonsense,



whatever floats his boat I guess. I saw him walk outside with some funny jar, but I've stopped caring what he does with his strange concoctions, since his sleeping aids are the only thing at make sleeping bearable in this place for most of the population, myself included (these dirt walls don't stop spawn sounds as well as one would think.) But Ashsaber and Softa, if nothing else, can be seen as the one thing that will forever be preserved here should the fortress fall. Their cries will call travelers here, so that they may see our sacrifice when we are gone.

Also I decided to finish the road Mr Frog started work on during his reign as overseer. Now I need to figure out where the hell the levers that operate the roadway bridges for this summer. Oh and this poor bastard is still stuck. I have no idea how Mr Frog gets these images, but when I need to see something he makes sure it gets seen.



*[Poor bastard. All his friends died around him, his arms are broken, and we've locked him in a stairwell.]*

### 23rd Slate, 207.

The liaison informed Simon Tam that the capital is in need of head protection and medical supplies. They tacked on a few odds and ends, among their wants being wooden cups. This being a fortress with so many stone ones, so having some wooden ones commissioned for trade shouldn't matter much.

| Good           | Price | Priority |
|----------------|-------|----------|
| bracelets      | 175%  | -10!-    |
| wooden goblets | 182%  | --10!    |
| large gems     | 132%  | !0!-     |
| plants         | 157%  | -10!-    |
| toys           | 212%  | ---!0    |
| headwear       | 212%  | ---!0    |
| splints        | 160%  | -10!-    |
| thread         | 207%  | ---!0    |
| drinks         | 181%  | --10!    |
| powder         | 210%  | ---!0    |

The Liaison also departed today, and with that, we are finally recognized as an official addition to our great nation!

**Lokumokab and the surrounding lands have been made a barony**

Now I have more reason than ever to do my best for this fortress. And should I make unreasonable demands..... I'll blame no-one but myself if they go unheeded. Just as I tend to throw things at my wall, I'll probably want stupid things made.... But I'll do what I must to keep myself sane.... There's some pain that no amount of booze or Mr Frog's potions can fix.

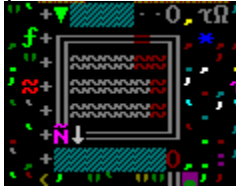
### 2nd Felsite, 207.

At long last! The final one has slipped and signed his death warrant!

**→Intruders! Drive them away!**

As functionality was returned to the original bridge to the depot, I was having more walls erected when the bastard struck! Doctormonch was assisting in building a floor for one of the recently built towers when he was bitten by the foul mystic. *[Seriously. His response to walking into Doctormonch was to try and take a chunk out of him. He was going to go sleep in the barracks I added near the depot after he finished*

(that's where he went and crapped out after the fight.)]

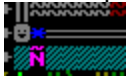


Nevyn was also heading to the same tower and saw the fight and seemed to have moved to assist Doctormonch, now fighting for his life bashing away with his crossbow! Nevyn however, decided to finish the floor instead. Prick.

But, all was not lost! And we now may have a new mascot!

The Smeltdorf/mason breaks the grip of The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer's upper front teeth on The Smeltdorf/mason's upper body.  
→The Smeltdorf/mason attacks The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer but She jumps away!

The stupid fuck ducked a swing and went right into the old bridge pit.



[Before]



[After. Good job dumbass!]

I ordered the ramp back up floored over, and the worker never even got it done. Doctormonch ran right down the ramp and came back up with gray matter on his crossbow.

The Smeltdorf/mason charges at The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer!  
The Smeltdorf/mason bashes The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer in the head with his (bronze crossbow), bruising the muscle, jamming the skull through the brain and tearing the brain!  
The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer has been knocked unconscious!  
The Smeltdorf/mason collides with The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer!  
→The Mountain Barbarian Hunter necromancer is knocked over!

### 3rd Felsite, 207.

I've decide that as first act as baron of this fortress, I am going to establish a few military awards, so that our soldiers have something as a sign we know, care about, and respect their work and sacrifices. Especially Fischer. She's traded raising a family and living a peaceful life for the life of a warrior. such a life is nasty, brutal, and often short. I know this from my own experiences when I took part in the battle at the Smooth Points of Pride.

The Adamantine Cross - The highest honor any of out soldiers will receive. A medal made of pure adamantine, crossed pikes over a cross and a skull in the foreground. All those soldiers who fought the undead shall receive one.

The Iron Order - Awarded to those who held their ground in the face of seemingly unbeatable odds. Fischer deserves recognition for that. A shield with a winged pike forged from iron shall be this medal's form.

The Civil Defense Order of Valor - To those who've fought the enemies of our nation without being a true soldier and won. Doctormonch shall receive one of these, as will Askad, Bloodeyes, and Terrahex, for their efforts against the necromancers. It will be made from copper, and will be of a fist clutching a crossbow on a diamond

background.

The Copper Heart - Any who've gone to the hospital and lived will receive one. I am going to have one awarded to The Master's lover on his behalf posthumously, since he had survived it before Mitch's reforms. It will be made from copper with an image of our first monarch upon it.

[I'll include the pics of the engravings later on. Glad I got this update out, with pics!]  
[[Talvieno's note: He forgot to add the engraving pics.]]

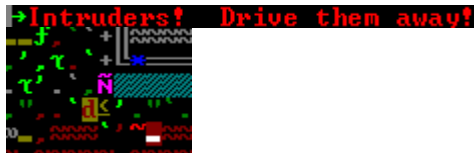
**(Splint):** Another fucking necromancer got spotted by a puppy wandering around. WHY CAN I NOT HAVE A FORT FREE OF THESE ASSHOLES!?

**(Aseaheru):** I think it's a manhood thing.  
"If you can brave the blood plain, the Spawn, and the dwarves of the place called Spearbreakers, then you truly are a Necromancer. Plus, you have to recover the books we lost there."

## **SPLINT:**

### **7th Felsite, 207.**

ANOTHER FUCKING NECROMANCER. How many more of these worthless dregs do we have to kill to get the point across there is no fun to be had here for them!?



Fischer was bringing in some trap component or another when she heard the pup yelping, so she went out and confronted him. According to one of the roofers, she called the necromancer "A blight on the world's ass in need of a good stompin'." before kicking his ass.



*[Either Fischer is really that good or he made no effort to defend himself except punching a puppy. He got no attacks in before he died. It essentially amounted to three pages of Fischer stabbing the fuck out him with her named steel pike until she got a bleed out kill.]*

### **12th Felsite, 207.**

Hoo boy....

**'Nevyn' Mehtobul, Gem Setter has been possessed!**

Let's hope he doesn't end up like The Master did.... Though it's entirely possible

whatever possessed him is trying again using Nevyn...

### 15th Felsite, 207.

He spent 3 days gathering materials, some rough claro opals and citrines.

rough claro opals  
rough claro opals  
rough citrines

Come on Nevyn.... Don't succumb to the madness that claimed my friend...

### 16th Felsite, 207.

Lor shot a raven for no real reason. Nothing of note happened otherwise.

### 20th Felsite, 207.

'Nevyn' Mehtobul, Gem Setter has created Ngobol Unib, a claro opal statue of dwarves!

Press Enter to close window

He finished, thank the gods. Not a weapon, but I'll take it. It's a stunning monument to the founding of the settlement, called The Glumness of Rags.... How did he know what Stova looked like?

### 23rd Felsite, 207.

The elves finally arrived. Good time to foist all our useless shit on them. Ordinarily I'd just gut the little pointy-eared tree-humping fuckwits, but we need to get rid of our mountains of junk, one way or another.

## SPLINT:

[An update! Now with 30% more goblin bodies!]

### 25th Felsite, 207.

I fucking hate elves. We now have an expanded junk collection because of an errant piece of wood. No more trading with them. We either ignore them or kill them. No exceptions, I also decided to set a work order to turn whatever wood we have left into bins. When the humans come, we'll probably give away more stuff than we'll sell.

Oh, and a soldier named Fervus ran into a thief while he was off duty. Needless to say it didn't end so well for the kobold.

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D 21st Felsite, 207

The Army Dwarf charges at The Kobold Thief!  
The Kobold Thief looks surprised by the ferocity of The Army Dwarf's onslaught!  
The Army Dwarf hacks The Kobold Thief in the head with her \*steel battle axe\*, tearing apart the muscle, shattering the skull and tearing apart the brain!  
An artery has been opened by the attack!  
A tendon in the skull has been torn!  
The Kobold Thief has been knocked unconscious!  
The \*steel battle axe\* has lodged firmly in the wound!  
The Army Dwarf collides with The Kobold Thief!  
→The Kobold Thief is knocked over and tumbles backward!

The fight reportedly lasted all of 15 seconds.

### 26th Felsite, 207.

Goblins! Thank the gods so many of the workers outside were armed. I put out an emergency alert for everyone to head inside, while Fischer and the rest of 1st and 2nd Squads rushed outside.

As I was in my office at the time of the shouting from outside reached me, I have to rely on second hand accounts.

**→An ambush! Curse them!**

Nevyn got the first hit in, sending a bolt into the lead goblin's weapon arm!

**The flying <iron bolt> strikes The Goblin Lasher in the left upper arm, chipping the bone through the <<giant cave spider silk cloak>>!**  
**→The Goblin Lasher loses hold of the <copper scourge>.**

Ironheart disabled one's leg.

**The flying <\*iron bolt\*> strikes The Goblin Hammerman in the left lower leg, chipping the bone through the <<armadillo leather trousers>>!**  
**A ligament has been torn and a tendon has been torn!**  
**→The Goblin Hammerman falls over.**

Ironheart showed remarkable intelligence and fell back with Nevyn, and the two began hammering the goblins with bolts while the mixed jumble of soldiers charged. Evidently many of the workers outside were off duty 1st and 2nd squad members. [Seriously. Nevyn and Ironheart got caught out hauling shale to a road site, and with the goblins between them and safety they just retreated to a "safe distance" and started shooting without even being activated.]



*[I think I deployed a few men too many for this.]*

**The Goblin Hammerman bashes The Army Dwarf in the head from behind with her <<iron maul>>, but the attack is deflected by The Army Dwarf's \*iron helm\*!**

Evidently Karakzon was saved by Talvi's handiwork. *[Masterwork iron helm for the win.]*

Jack Magnus scored the first kill of the battle, scoring a "Bleedout" as the soldiers refer to such combat deaths.

There was one particularly tough hammer gob that took quite the beating during the fight, compared to their lasherleader, who had passed out from sheer pain at the outset when he'd been shot in the hand. Fervus struck down the resilient goblin, sending his steel axe through the goblin's crude helmet and thus his brain, scoring the second kill of the battle.



*[How the fuck he was still alive when this happened I'll never know. He was killed by Fervus shortly after this pic was snapped.]*

A soldier named Gorefast got the leader, and third kill, decapitating the foul greenskin in one fell swing. Fisher, annoyed by one's attempt to flee, knocked all his teeth out with an angry mailed fist. Hakah claimed the kill when he bisected the goblin's toothless head down the middle. Last to fall was some poor bastard on the unfinished bridge. Fervus ended the battle when his axe tasted more goblin brain matter.

Thankfully, no-one was hospitalized and not but greenskins will be sent to meet their war god.

*[One hell of a fight, the sheer number of dwarves actually restricting this to a single ingame day.]*

### **27th Felsite, 207.**

More cries of ambushers erupted by the worksite, and many of the civil defense units sprung into action, firing on the enemy in an attempt to save Codyorr, who narrowly escaped with his life after he fired a shot at an aggressor who jumped him.

Mr Frog was reported as bellowing at those under his command within earshot to hold their positions, all while he himself was at the forefront of the ambush. Fischer was taking a goblin's tooth as a trophy, and Gemblade was laying a path across the pond, and so rushed to join the fray.



*[Yes, that's Mr Frog fighting the goblins directly with his crossbow, right at the front.]*

Fischer plowed right by to save Codyorr, who was now firing on the enemy from the hill above, while Gemblade and several other soldiers rushed to meet the enemy. Mr Frog still held his position as well. He'll be put in for an award if he makes it.... No. No he will make it. Fischer's there, he'll be fine.

A dwarfette named Uvash, child in backpack, struck hardest first, "liberating" a goblin's feet from his body. As I felt the need to go on interviewing the soldiers to be nonexistent, I retired to my office for a time.

*[the battle escalated, but at one point, I shit you not, they more or less bowled over one lasher and left her standing there, probably confused as to what the hell just happened, until they came back from killing her squadmates.]*

I do know the kills went as follows:

Fervus: One kill, smashed the goblin's skull in with his hand. This was the squad leader, a swordsgoblin.

Uvash + child: one kill, first battle death of the ambush; Bleedout.

One kill, slayer unknown, by bisection, so it was one of the axedwarves.

The rest, I have no idea. I have posted first squad on site for emergency response. Workers are already bringing bodies in, taking them to the trash closet in the mess hall.

### **28th Felsite, 207.**

I have officially named Fischer our champion. She will do us proud.

Quite the far cry from my time as overseer during the founding of the fortress! Such an eventful spring!

## **MR FROG:**

### **Journal of Mr Frog**

Entry #3589

I was outside collecting samples for the project when a small platoon of those barbaric goblins showed up and began roughing up our workers; one of them had the temerity to attack me. The mechanisms in my crossbow jammed -- blast these dwarves -- and I may have lost my temper slightly; the next thing I remember is Fischer pulling me off of its mangled form before finishing it off for me. Stupid, puffed-up cow; I'm more than a match for these primitive goblins and their meager training and equipment -- I didn't even have to deploy the syringe guns, though I did end up wasting a hallucinogenic gas capsule. Her effort would have been better-spent aiding those without my tactical and intellectual advantages.

In any case, I appear to be more-or-less unharmed. My chain mail is incredibly ill-

fitting, however; I'm not as broad-framed (or, for that matter, obese) as these dwarves. I've had to clip it in the back in three places to keep it from getting in the way. Fortunately, the extra space allows me to stash an incredible amount of concealed weaponry inside the folds; the pneumatic syringe guns in my sleeves have some very fun friends now. Here's hoping none of them leak; I've built up a useable supply of medigel, but not enough to patch up systemic fourth-degree chemical burns.

### **Information on the Syringe Guns**

They're basically hollow, diamond-tipped barbed needles connected by a long, thin tube to a small supply of concentrated poison and a pump. Pressurized air launches the needle out of a barrel, after which the needles lodge in the victim's flesh and poison is pumped into their bloodstream through the tubes. The device straps to the forearm and is easily-concealed under sleeves. They're not terribly accurate -- even for someone practiced in their use -- and have terrible range, but they're more efficient than gas at getting poison into someone's body. They're operated by small buttons on the heel of the wearer's palm -- think Spider-Man.

It's a bit silly, but it seems fitting for Frog to have a concealed chemical deathweapon on his person.

## **HANSLANDA:**

### **Hated Heroes**

Urist and Hans sat in Hans' tiny room. Hans was perched carefully on a tiny dacite chair, his massive body overshadowing the stone throne. Urist was sitting on the edge of Hans' bed, sipping from a garish orthoclase mug, filled with an even more garish drink. It was probably sewer brew at some point in time, but after a couple of Mr Frog's sedatives and several days fermenting in the dining hall, it was something entirely new. The two dwarves idly conversed about the weather, new work orders being posted around the fortress, and their new friends among the skulkers. Lately, the only people Urist and Hans had spoken to were the skulkers. Their adventure with Vanya had taught them a newfound appreciation for the lowest class dwarves of the fortress. In addition to this, all of the higher class dwarves of Spearbreakers avoided Urist and Hans like the plague for their trail and attempted execution. Despite the pardon, most dwarves considered them both guilty of treason regardless.

So, Urist and Hans were in the tiny apartment-like chambers, drinking steadily and making idle chatter. This day, they were interrupted by a gentle *tap-tap* on Hans' door. They shared a significant glance, and waited for a moment. *Thud-thud*. The knock came harder this time, less polite.

Hans stood and swept the door open, surprising Feb the militia dwarf even though he'd been knocking at the door. Hans glared at the dwarf silently, sullenly. Feb stammered for a moment, then said, "You- Uh, you've been summoned by the overseer. By Baron Splint. He'd like to see you immediately."

Hans turned back to Urist, and Urist shrugged at him silently. Hans turned back to Feb and said, "Why?"

Feb shrugged at the imposing dwarf and said, "Why should I know? I'm just a



messenger. He wants to see you right now, and that is all I know." Feb shrugged again, uncomfortably at Hans' unrelenting stare.

Hans nodded at Feb, and shut the door. He and Urist shared an amused look, then both gathered a few items and slipped out the back door, just to spite Feb.

They didn't speak on their way to Splint's rooms, instead sharing knowing looks. This summons had been expected, in light of the recent rash of goblin ambushes. It had been a few months since their adventures with Vanya, and nothing really had happened since then but these rapid fire ambushes. No attention from the goblins for a very long time, and now this. Urist had immediately realized something was up. Goblins didn't turn their attention to you for no reason. What with the undead having been vanquished so recently, Urist reckoned that the goblins thought they had a good chance at breaking Spearbreakers.

How wrong the goblins were. With the use of Mr Frog's combat simulator, the soldiers of Spearbreakers had tripled in skill in months instead of years. They wore steel and iron of the finest quality, not to mention how the most elite lords of the military wore the blessed adamantine.

Urist had also guessed that the goblins were ambushing the workers around Spearbreakers to weaken the fortress and scout out its defenses. His final assumption was that the overseer would summon the two most expendable soldiers in the fortress to scout the goblins back... Forcefully.

They entered Splint's mostly dirt-walled rooms. The floor was plated with dull gray metal, and there was a few tasteful statues and well made pieces of golden furniture. Splint was seated in one of the golden thrones, writing in his journal somewhat furiously. He looked up as they entered, and waved briefly at a pair of stone chairs in front of his desk.

Urist and Hans remained standing as he finished writing. Splint gave them a derisive glare as he closed his journal and set it aside, then pulled a sheaf of parchment papers out of his desk drawer. He spread them out neatly on his desk and tapped a couple of them in turn as he spoke, "As you two know from the alarm drums and what you may have learned from the rumor mill, we have been ambushed several times quite recently by the goblins. It is the belief of our senior military members that this is a precursor to something more serious." Splint looked at the two outcasts now, "This is where you come in. The last two attacks have come from the east, and the south-west. We tracked them to the edge of our patrol range, and we have a good idea where their logistics camps may be. We want you two to go to their camps, kill them all, and search for anything that might help us." Splint paused after he said this, and looked at them expectantly.

Hans had his usual blank look spread across his face, and Urist was stroking his beard thoughtfully. They stood like this for a very long time, making Splint incredibly angry. Finally, Urist broke the tense silence by saying, "What if we die and can't report back in?"

Splint was a bit taken aback by this, obviously prepared for different questions. He said, "I... I don't think it will be an issue. You are both well-equipped, extremely capable dwarves. I'm sure you will be fine."

Hans said, "What if it is just random goblin incursions?" He'd been carefully coached by Urist on how to say 'incursion' properly, for just this occasion.

Splint said, "Then you will finish them off before they can attack us any more. If that is the case, surely the camps won't be very large, less than forty apiece."

Urist sighed, and nodded at Splint, "Okay, we'll do it." Splint smiled and started to say something, when Urist interrupted him, "*After* you tell us what's in it for us."

Splint glared at Urist murderously, and pulled out a sheet of parchment from his desk. It was rather unremarkable, just a few words on it. Urist read it carefully, his face carefully arranged to give nothing away. It said,

You will do this for Spearbreakers, or you will both be exiled permanently, by order of the Baron.

Urist smiled at Splint, and said, "Very well. But what if we had wanted to be exiled, to leave this hellhole?"

Splint sighed and rolled his eyes, "Then Fischer and her squad would have detained you in the Research Center for some of Mr Frog's... Experiments."

Urist sighed, and left Splint's office, Hans in tow. The two didn't return to their barracks, didn't go anywhere but out of the fortress. They walked out of the blood plain and into the deep wilderness surrounding the fortress.

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After a day and most of a night spent in the wilderness, the pair of former soldiers came to a large bluff overlooking one of the goblin camps. It was a bustling, ramshackle affair, with large hide tents scattered about pretty much at random, a pile of corpses of various creatures on one side of the camp. A large bonfire burned merrily in the center, and the two soldiers spotted a few sentries patrolling around the camp lazily.

Urist and Hans surveyed the camp for a long time, counting goblins and tents, memorizing the lay out and very quietly discussing their plans. Finally, they decided they had all the information they could glean, and went separate ways down the bluff.

Urist made his way to the corpse pile stealthily. One of the sentries was drawing near, his red eyes lit up against the blackness of the night. Urist saw just as clearly as the goblin did in the dark, but he had an advantage in that his eyes did not glow brightly. Urist lay down in the corpse pile, and waited for the goblin to pass. When the way was clear, Urist scrambled on all fours across the short intervening space between him and the tent immediately in front of him.

This tent was the most ornate of all the tents in the camp, which was why Urist had chosen this side to approach. Either it was the leader's tent, and Urist could assassinate the most likely very dangerous goblin first, or it was the mess hall, and Urist would be in a world of trouble.

Urist got very close to the hide wall of the tent, and listened carefully for the telltale ruckus of goblin dining. He heard nothing, and slit a large hole in the tent with his dagger. He slipped carefully through the hole, to find himself directly behind a very ornate bone throne with a sleeping goblin warlord in it. The warlord wore iron armor, and had a silver warhammer leaning against his knees. His ears were pierced with earrings made of bone and teeth, and his helmet had been decorated with more bone and pieces of animal horn.

Urist crept up behind the rather large goblin, and peered around the throne at the insides of the large tent. The tentpole in the center of the tent was festooned with skulls and banners depicting goblins killing sentients. Around the outside edges of the tent were chests and cabinets, most tightly locked. The floor was coated with fur rugs from various animals, mostly bears, but with a few lion and cougar skins thrown in as well. A pair of trolls could be seen through the open tent flap, on either side of the entrance. Urist grimaced, hoping he was quiet enough to not attract the huge monsters' attention.

Urist quietly put his dagger against the goblin's throat. The goblin woke up instantly at the light touch of the blade; a lifetime lived among backstabbing, vicious rivals forcing the goblin to be a very light sleeper. He kicked his chair over backwards, bowling Urist over as he drew his dagger sideways roughly. Urist scored a gash across the chieftain's jaw line, but didn't get the artery.

The chieftain snatched up his hammer and spun to face his adversary. His ghastly

visage registered surprise when he realized Urist was a dwarf, then hateful rage. He jumped at the struggling dwarf, his hammer swinging furiously, a strange sounding battlecry ripping from his throat.

Urist rolled out from under the swing at the last second, and kept rolling. He dodged another swing this way, and grabbed a cabinet and pulled it over. The cabinet bought Urist a moment to whip out his spear and gain a little maneuvering room. The chieftain didn't advance immediately after Urist, a cruel smile on his face as the two trolls burst into the room behind Urist. The goblin said something in its guttural, evil language, then laughed.

Urist looked at the trolls, and winced. Then he leapt at the goblin, spear leading. The goblin danced back a step, avoiding the hasty lunge, and swiped his warhammer in a short arc in line with Urist's face. Urist skidded to a stop and leaned back, letting the blow pass in front of his face with a whistle of air. Urist leaned back in and stabbed at the same time. The spear punched through the goblin's breastplate and mail, and scored a long gash across the warlord's side.

The chieftain looked at the spear curiously, then back at Urist amusedly. In crude, heavily accented dwarven, it said, "Bad strike, rockbeast. Troll." Urist crinkled his nose at the hideous accent, then was swept aside by a smashing troll's hand. Urist tumbled into a casket, and righted himself hurriedly. The spear had been torn from his grasp, still lodged in the warlord's armor. All he held now was his dagger. The second troll closed with him swiftly, its massive hands balled into fists, its mouth stretched open in a guttural roar.

Urist ducked under the first swing, and slashed his dagger across the back of the troll's arm, ripping through the bunched up triceps easily. It bellowed again, and Urist stabbed it viciously in the chest, the dagger slipping neatly between two ribs. The wounded troll's expression shifted from rage to fear in a second, and it hastily stumbled back from the dangerous dwarf. Urist pursued it, stabbing and slashing brutally. The other troll came up on his side, and Urist dodged around the wounded troll, putting the wildly backpedaling monster between Urist and the uninjured troll. As the wounded troll scurried out of the tent, the other troll charged at Urist. Urist smiled, and stepped to the side at the last second. The troll barreled into the center tentpole like a rampaging elephant, easily snapping the thick cedar beam. The tent came crashing down around the combat, and Urist slit another hole in the hide easily. He scrambled up on top of the collapsed tent, avoiding the large lump near him, and attacking the smaller lump trying to get out from under the tent.

He stabbed at the shifting lump furiously, the big holes he punched in the tent fabric quickly getting soaked with blood and gore as he scored hit after hit on the goblin under him. Finally, the chieftain had stopped moving, and Urist slit the tent open again, retrieving his spear from the corpse of the goblin. Urist looked up from his kill to see the wounded troll standing at the edge of the collapsed tent, a triumphant look on its' face. Beside it stood the whole camp of goblins, all with grim smiles on their faces.

Urist sighed, and the large lump in the tent finally ripped through the hide, revealing the uninjured troll. Urist sighed again, frustrated at how badly this fight had gone, when Hans smashed into the loose line of goblins, his silver warhammer smashing skulls and shattering bones easily. The injured troll's victorious look faded as he turned to survey the newest threat. Just as it turned fully around, Hans reached it, and brought his warhammer crashing into its ugly face.

Urist dashed at the uninjured troll as it was distracted by the arrival of Hans, and tackled into it, spear leading. He fully impaled the troll, his spear going all the way through its broad chest and bursting out of the front of it. Urist let go of the hopelessly stuck spear, and stabbed the troll's neck with his dagger, once, twice, three times. On the third stab, he felt his blade go through a vertebra, and the troll

collapsed in a heap, its limbs lifeless.

Urist pulled at his spear, but looked up to see Hans surrounded by goblins, fighting desperately. Urist abandoned the spear, and took his broken jade spearpoint out of his belt pouch in his off-hand as he charged the fray.

Urist slammed into three of the goblins, bowling them all over into a heap of tangled limbs. Urist was stabbing randomly into the three goblins, scoring numerous hits. Another two goblins turned from fighting against Hans to aim careful strikes at Urist. Urist finished one confused goblin, then another, before he felt the first blow. It struck his shoulder, jarring the limb but not penetrating the armor. The next deflected off his helmet. Urist left the last stunned goblin bleeding profusely on the ground, and turned to face the two attackers. One held an iron sword in its green-skinned hands, and the other a bronze axe.

They split, circling around Urist as best they could. Urist tried to keep them both in his view, but they were working very well together, one feinting while the other quick-stepped out of Urist's view. Urist grew tired of their game, and rolled forwards, turning on a dime as he stood. They both slashed at him viciously from either side. Urist dodged the sword and deflected the axe off his dagger adroitly. He stepped in as he deflected the axe and stabbed with both weapons into the axegoblin's belly. The dagger skipped off the goblin's crude bronze armor, but the jade spearpoint flashed that eerie green light for an instant as it tore right through the armor and the flesh underneath.

Urist tore the spearpoint out to the side, spilling the goblins guts in a reeking heap on the dirt. He spun to face the swordsgoblin, and intercepted its telegraphed overhand swing with both his weapons crossed. He kicked the goblin in the groin, and stabbed it in the face with his dagger. It fell to the ground, rolling about in agony and screaming.

Urist turned back to the axegoblin, but it had already fallen over, unconscious and dying of shock. Urist kept turning to see the battle was over. Hans had overcome the last few goblins facing him easily, and was going about crushing skulls of the wounded. Urist stomped on the swordsgoblin's head almost idly, and decided to retrieve his spear from the paralyzed troll.

As Urist pulled out his stuck spear, he lost his footing and crashed into a cabinet covered with the folds of the tent. The cabinet split open under his weight, spilling its contents. Urist recalled the vast amount of containers in the chieftain's tent, and ripped open the tent to gaze upon the contents of the cabinet.

Scrolls, most written in blood, some in purloined ink or dye. All in the crude goblin hieroglyphs. Urist smiled to himself, and waved at Hans, "Hans, come over here. We need to search this whole tent, to see if we can find more of these scrolls. I think they're what we came here for."

Hans joined Urist, blood dripping from every part of his armor. He toed through the scrolls, and nodded blankly. Hans said, "Alright, but first let's pull this tent off of it all, it will make it easier to search."

They managed to get the heavy hide tent covering pulled off to one side, then threw it in the fire. The two gore-encrusted dwarves searched through the chests and cabinets, then through the other tents. They found enough scrolls and parchment scraps to fill up one of the wooden chests with, after dumping out the bone trinkets in it.

Urist and Hans carried the chest between them as they walked back toward Spearbreakers. This time, the journey was leisurely, and took two days instead of one.

[[Talvieno's note: Splint was moving so quickly with the updates that the canon writers among us didn't have time to write our stories. Splint would gradually lose steam, however.]]

## **SPLINT:**

### **6th Hematite, 207.**

Summer has been quiet this first week. Aside from a fortress guard demanding that nobody touch his crossbow, nothing happened so far.

I finally got 1st Squad's barracks finished, with the iron doors being bolted on earlier today. I've also decided to squander some iron for walls on a new barracks outside on the roadway. Speaking of which, it's mostly finished now, at least around the walls. I drafted a number of people to assist in the construction of the roads. A kaolinite bridge was also finished on the 4th of this month, and the last of the backed up smithing orders was finished.

### **12th hematite, 207.**

Niccolo has been named a Pikemaster by the champion. Construction goes smoothly, with the goblins ceasing their harassments. I knew sending Hans and that soldier out was the right call. Thanks to them, we also have an idea of where a number of larger camps are, so we'll be ready. Plus I have a friend in the human merchant nobility, and I can see that he ensures our monarch gets the maps and plans, so that he may deploy a contingent of soldiers to stamp the goblins out before they get any bright ideas.

### **13th Hematite, 207.**

All of the masterpieces being churned out by Rochia, Ast, and Loud Whispers has me considering putting up a scoreboard in the mess hall.

Oh, and some idiot thought floor grates to hold another FROG unit would be able to hold up a stone floor.

**→A section of the cavern has collapsed!**

It resulted in a portion of the road getting destroyed, the shale block shattering the pavement.



*[Splint is not amused. It took the better part of slate to build that road.]*

Rodge got knocked on his ass but he's fine now. The road is being reconstructed, and should be finished in four or five days, as the materials are now just strewn about the worksite.

### **15th Hematite, 207.**

Since they have notoriously short life expectancies, I've ordered our giant grasshopper and jumping spider be turned into meals. Such a shame, as the giant jumping spider would have made a fine fighting beast.

### 18th Hematite, 207.

A worker replacing a wall for the newest FROG unit spotted a snatcher today.

**→Snatcher! Protect the children!**

he got shot at by said worker and his friend, herding him towards Fischer, though he decided to take his chances with two dwarves armed with crossbows than one frothing rage-fueled dwarf of debatable femininity.



*[in the time it took the goblin to move four steps towards the fort, and get shot at five times (all misses) Fischer was already on him. I don't care if there was some god mode glitch or what, I am legit scared of Fischer now.]*

I decided to have Fischer remain on post in case more snatchers showed up, and no sooner had I issued the order did I hear her shouting she got another one. I think I'll put out a decree that our soldiers may claim teeth and skulls as trophies. After all, nothing quite says "STAY THE FUCK AWAY" than the head-and-or-toothless bodies of your comrades littering the enemy fortress.

**→Snatcher! Protect the children!**



*[One nameless goblin asshole vs Champion Fischer! place your bets everyone!]*

Yeah it didn't end very well for the goblins. A third was spotted and the fortress guards in the area joined in, severely injuring one before Fischer went to work. She skewered the second's brain, and scored a bleedout kill on the third.

### 19th Hematite, 207.

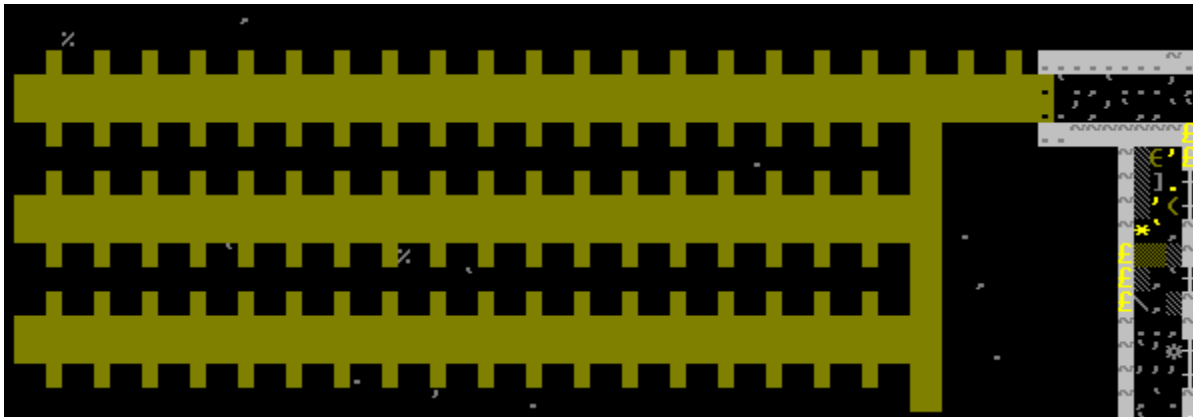
Megaman and Codyorr literally walked into another snatcher today.

**→Snatcher! Protect the children!**

If my memory serves me correctly, these snatcher crews typically work in teams of 2 to four morons. And this one clearly hadn't heard the cries of his allies, and Codyorr shot him in his snatchbag hand and his chest for his trouble. Fischer killed him however.

**→Likot Afenbin. Ghostly Merchant has risen and is haunting the fortress!**

Well. That's no good. In response to this poor fellow's rise, I've ordered whatever slabs we have engraved. Among those to be memorialized is The Master. The last thing I need is his ghost coming back and tearing people's limbs off or picking a fight with Fischer.



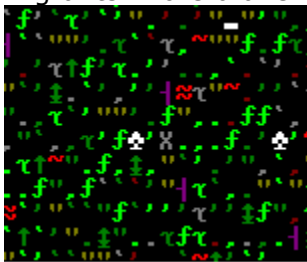
I've ordered the above area dug out for headstones. I've also suspended the drink production order, as we have enough drink to last for at least two years, probably far longer. I've also decided to build a mill, as we don't seem to have one anywhere. And I wish someone would get those clear glass blocks I asked for the garden made.

### **21st Hematite, 207.**

If they didn't hold up a floor last time they won't hold up a wall... Corai got hospitalized with a broken leg, since a block slid off a grate and fell on him.

### **22nd Hematite, 207.**

Migrants! More brave hearts have come to bolster our numbe-



*[That grey 'X' was literally the only migrant we got. Armok hates us.]*

One. One dwarf showed up. Bit tall and thin for a dwarf, but then so is Mr Frog. Maybe she's a relative of his? Oh, and a snatcher showed up. A fortress guard shot him in the head as he tried to escape. I'm going to have a hammerdwarf from Fischer's squad deal with that goblin head so we can install a replacement FROG on the tunnel.

There is probably more to come, and these few snatchers probably herald goblin strike teams in the area.

## **TALVIENO:**

[[Talvieno's note: This was later decided to be incorrect.]]

### **The Origin of Spearbreakers, As I Understand It**

Many years ago, when the world was young, brave dwarven men and women (condemned criminals and the scum of society) set out to build themselves a new

home in the wilderness among the uncharted mountains of the north - Boatmurdered. This ended badly, and I won't elaborate on it here, but what was finally left of the labyrinthine fortress was a smoking hole in the ground, surrounded by vast magma plains that went on for miles, as somebody forgot to pull the lever a second time before they left.

Over the years, demons and foul beasts of the pits collected in the cursed, smoking landmark, calling it their home; their safe haven. It was their stronghold - the first stronghold of the dominions of hell. Dwarfkind shuddered at its mention, and feared its spectral ruler, Sankis.

Brave dwarves set out - paladins and knights of the most recognized orders - and founded a mighty fortress in the center of the vast lava plains - the last outpost of civilization: Headshoots. For many years, it alone stemmed the tide and kept the evil at bay, until Sankis himself appeared in the pits below the fortress and turned their two best soldiers - Nemo and Holistic Detective - into skeletal, demonic beings. These two monstrosities laid waste to the fortress and then proceeded to kill each other, but Holistic survived and returned to Sankis, her new master. Sankis granted her immortality and the ability to reproduce at will...

Many years later, a bunch of poor fools settled in a miserable, icy, waterless hellhole they called a fortress, and named it Syrupleaf. They were soon besieged by leagues upon leagues of the Spawn of Holistic - the children of that cursed warrior, created in the image of their mother. They were watched from afar by a strange corporation known as Parasol, but this company made no attempt to interfere or save the fortress from its fate. Eventually the dwarves died out, and the world was destroyed by Armok, and nothing remained.

But outside the flow of normal spacetime, in a parallel universe, Parasol *did* remain, and it saw nothingness. "Let there be light", the great scientists spoke, and a light came on in the room - a bulb hanging from the ceiling. And they saw that it was good: they could see their keyboards again. The scientists of Parasol endeavored to turn back time, and so they did: to the moment before Syrupleaf fell. They trapped the falling fortress in a stasis bubble, and Armok was appeased, but still he chose to wipe the Spawn from the face of Everoc so they would never naturally trouble dwarfkind again. Then, largely for his own amusement, he replaced them with Vampires. It was to be many years before the dwarves managed to defeat this threat.

But outside of Armok's realm of power, Parasol remained - with their captured Holistic Spawn. They made genetic modifications to the species, and eventually needed to test them... releasing them in the wilderness not too far from the Dwarven mainland. They wiped out the mountain barbarians and proceeded onwards towards the dwarven capital, but proceeded no farther! The dwarves founded a fortress as a last defense against the seemingly unstoppable onslaught (of zombies, more than Spawn) - a military fortress with a crew of seasoned veterans of the Vampire wars - a fortress with a name that came to mean hell itself: Spearbreakers.

However, Ballpoint, a parasitic organization with transdimensional travel, had followed Parasol to Everoc. They saw the genetically mutated creatures that Parasol was testing, and desired them for their own: as instruments of war. Thus began the great time wars in which even Armok himself felt called to play a part, leading the great heroes of Spearbreakers to victory, granting Fischer superdwarven powers and killing The Master for no apparent reason other than the fact he was bored (though possibly Armok just wanted the crazy bastard up there with him to laugh at the dwarves running around below).



## TALVIENO:

### **Vanya's Journals, Part 16**

*Vanya's journal entries continue on the pages following, and for many more after that. The parchment sheets are considerably less cluttered than her previous journal, likely indicating she wasn't nearly as idle. The following entry is dated, but the first line is smudged, as Vanya appears to have traded her pencil in favor of ink, which she wasn't used to using. All you can make out is that it was written during year 207, Splint's reign, early spring.*

If Mr Frog is the Devil, then his laboratory (what he calls his room) ought to be considered hell. It is therefore ironic that I was so blissful those first few hours after arriving, and that his domain was such a wonderland for the inquisitive mind. Yet my enthusiasm gradually faded as I realized how hard he was going to push me, starting early the next morning.

"Get up! Get up!" someone cried, startling me out of my dreams.

Not even fully awake, and with no idea of what was going on, I rolled out of bed in fearful surprise, tripping over the covers in my attempt to stand. "What's going on?" I asked, bewildered. I had no idea where I was.

"It's time to get to work! I trust you slept well."

"What?" I mumbled, trying to figure out what was going on, as I clumsily pulled the sleeve of my shredded blouse back up onto my shoulder, as it had slipped downwards as I'd turned in my sleep. I blinked, trying to clear my bleary eyes, and made out a figure rushing back and forth as if doing morning chores. It was only then that I remembered all of the events of the previous day, and that I was in Mr Frog's guest room.

"I've brought you clothes that ought to fit," said Mr Frog, laying them down on a low stone table. "It's nothing flashy or 'pretty', you understand, but simply normal apparel, modified to be partially acid-resistant. You'll need it. There's a shower in the corner, as well as a sink, hairbrush, toothbrush, towel... get cleaned up and report to me promptly."

I rubbed at my eyes to clear the sleep from them. "Thank you," I said, trying to gather my wits, but Mr Frog had already left.

My first shower took me a little while to figure out, but eventually I managed. I'd never heard of or seen such a thing before - usually dwarves took baths. Still, it felt wonderful, almost like bathing in the rain on a warm summer day, without having to worry about catching a cold... but it's very undwarven: what dwarf likes standing in the rain?

Before long, I was clean, dressed in pants and shirt, my hair brushed neatly with a new beanie over it to cover my ears. And I had shoes - *new* shoes, made from giant emu leather.

I opened the sliding stone door and walked into Mr Frog's main room - his laboratory. For a few minutes, I stood idly as I watched him scurry about from table to table with beakers of liquids, apparently doing some sort of experiment. Finally, I decided to ask, "What time is it?" It felt far too early to be up, and I still felt sleep-

deprived. When you're used to sleeping on a stone shelf without a blanket, lying on a bed can make it hard to get to sleep.

"It's half past six," he responded, sending a cold stare in my direction. "You spent forever getting yourself cleaned up. I hope you learn to be more prompt in the future."

"Are we going to eat breakfast first?"

"There's a sink in your room, and I placed a nutrition bar in your right pants pocket," he said, not even offering a glance in my direction. "Eat that and we'll worry about actual food when we have more time."

I felt in my pocket and found it - a little brownish bar that smelled vaguely of mushrooms, but without the sweet plump helmet smell. I nibbled at it, and found it substantially more edible than the stale biscuits I'd had as prison rations. Turning to Mr Frog, I asked curiously, "Why don't we have much time?"

He walked past me quickly with a bubbling beaker, headed to another table as he responded, "I *never* have as much time here as I'd like. It's one of the fundamental flaws of this universe, not at all like universe Beta-17XG. There, you could spend hours doing nothing, and *still* manage to accomplish exactly what you wanted within your preferred length of time."

The flasks he was mixing suddenly gave a huge puff of yellow smoke, and he looked on in satisfaction, pouring the concoction into an apparatus with a long, twisted neck. "That will need to boil for a while," he told me, walking hurriedly over to his computer desk. "We don't have much time *right now* because the drug you consumed last night was experimental and possesses a short lifespan. Come over here and we can begin."

I sat down, and Mr Frog began assaulting me with questions. As he explained it, he theorized that my missing memories weren't gone at all, but only "altered to trigger natural automatic blocking". He'd said he wasn't sure how much I could recover with having been so close to my bracelet the day before, but he'd given me something meant to "counteract the alteration process".

"Think back over your memories of Wari," he said coolly, leaning against a pillar. "Do you remember her taking you anywhere?"

I thought back, my memories moving through my head rapidly like butter, as I grasped to keep hold of them. "I think I do..." I replied uncertainly. "I was terrified the whole time, wanting to beg her to let me go, or scream for help, but too afraid of the scalpel she held... and of it being found out that I was an elf. I remember her taking me somewhere, but it's all blurry - not at all like half a year ago in prison, when you gave me that other drink."

Mr Frog grimaced. "Blurry is fine. Do you remember where she took you? She would've taken you to her transdimensional portal. Do you know where it is, or what it looks like?"

"I..." I began, and suddenly stopped, looking at him in astonishment. "She took me to *your* room! And she took me..." I stood, looking about the room as I reenacted in my mind what I could remember. As the memory reached its end, I walked and stood next to the hoop I'd seen so many times before - the giant oval of wood through which the air shimmered. "She took me here," I told Mr Frog, looking back at him. "The same place Carena went through. I remember she was working with the controls on this box to the left," I added, pointing at the button-covered console attached to it, "but I don't remember what exactly she was doing... it's too blurry." Mr Frog regarded me carefully, a grave, concerned expression on his face. "That's my transdimensional portal..." he said after a moment. "We'll have to try this again when the bracelet's effect wears off more, to see if you can remember what coordinates she input." He shook his head and began pacing about the room,

scratching his beard in thought. "This is terrible news... If my room is being used by Parasol, Ballpoint, *and* Eris, it's incredible that I haven't stumbled into anyone by accident yet... But now at least I know why I constantly find my traps disarmed." I wandered back to where he was. "What would happen if someone happened to come through while you were in here?" He only shook his head grimly in response.

On a whim, I tried to see if I could remember my sister any better, and though I had a dim memory of practicing swordfighting, there still didn't appear to be anyone else in the room. I was very disappointed, and diverted my thoughts elsewhere as quickly as I could to avoid becoming depressed. "How was I able to take down those four soldiers outside your room?" I asked. It was something I'd been curious about - and had never had explained.

He rubbed his forehead as if to clear his mind. "Honestly, I have no fitting hypotheses on that event at the present time. If Parasol implanted 'combat abilities' in your mind, then the increased distance from your bracelet for a year should have weakened them to the point that they wouldn't work at all. Not only that, but you should've been able to easily defeat me each time we fought. Instead, and contrary to what might be expected, your abilities seemed to *weaken* as you came into closer proximity of the device. Now that it's destroyed, the abilities may eventually return, following the same behavior they did before... but I have no predictions as of yet on how long that will take.

"But come," he continued, picking up a notebook from the table beside him and scribbling notes down. "We have a mission that must be accomplished, not only for my continued and assured safety, but for that of Spearbreakers." I didn't like the sound of "mission", but I was curious all the same. "What would that be?"

"There is a special, important device that I accidentally left at my old office at Ballpoint - however, they likely moved it to the storage facilities following my disappearance... It's a PEA - a 'Personal Electronic Assistant'. You've held one before..." His pencil slowed, and he looked at me from his notebook suspiciously.

"Why were you holding it, anyway?"

I wasn't completely sure what he meant. "What?"

He sighed at me. "It's metal, it's got a little screen on the front."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "The little thing Talvi stole from you."

"Yes, exactly."

"I was... talking to Joseph..." I felt guilty about it suddenly, and Mr Frog's accusatory glare wasn't helping. "I didn't know who he was at the time!" I said defensively. "The PEA was buzzing and I accepted the call it on accident - I was trying to turn it off so it would stop making noise."

Mr Frog gave me a piercing stare for a moment, before turning back to his notebook, jotting something down. "Hrmph," he grunted, "You're currently incapable of lying anyway, thanks to what you drank last night. But before we sidetrack ourselves any further, let's get back to the matter at hand. You're going to need to infiltrate Ballpoint, posing as Carena - if you're any good as an actress, no one should question it unless they know her well, and few are likely to. At some point we'll need to investigate her, as she's our only link to Eris, but for now I just need that PEA. It contains blueprints for semi-automated weaponry and defense mechanisms that I *must* have in order to adequately protect myself from intruding agents."

I shook my head in fright. "Me, at *Ballpoint*?? I didn't think you were serious before!"

"I'm *always* serious," he shot at me. "Either way, you have no choice in the matter, unless you'd like to leave my service and be handed over to Splint. He has an especial hatred of your kind, and I'm sure you wouldn't enjoy his brand of

hospitality."

Thus, my training began. During the next few weeks, Mr Frog would have me study for hours and hours on end. *"I'll be compacting everything you need to know into concentrated segments. You'll need to keep an open mind, ignore everything you **thought** you knew up to this point, and pick up other things as you go along,"* he once told me early on. And that was exactly how it was.

The schedule was strict: Get up at six, get cleaned up in as short a time as possible so Mr Frog wouldn't yell at me for impromptness (later, I would learn to shower the night before to save time in the mornings), eat a nutrition bar (he kept changing the recipe) and help Mr Frog with various dangerous and potentially fatal experiments until lunch. I actually think he was training me in his field of study: wearing a lab coat and a pair of goggles, I would assist him in whatever way he requested, mostly mixing beakers and measuring out ingredients. Though I never saw his test subjects, possibly because he didn't want me to, many of the things we mixed were particularly nasty, such as a potion to separate the skin from the flesh. He taught me the various properties of the ingredients as we went along, occasionally testing me to see if I'd listened... but I guess bioneurological chemistry isn't my best subject: I pretty often answered wrong, to his extreme displeasure. But really, in all honesty, Mr Frog isn't a very good teacher. He expects me to know things without him explaining them first, and gets annoyed when he has to.

Following our typically late lunch, and all the way until he sent me to bed at nine o' clock, I studied, and I learned so, so much... for a girl who dearly loves books, the latter half of my days were a paradise. I sat at his desktop computer for hours on end, poring over article after article until my eyes ached. I learned about physics and electricity, different races I'd never heard of, the ways of Ballpoint and Parasol, but more than anything else, I learned about technology. It wasn't *actually* magic, but at first, it did *feel* like it... had I come across it a few years before, I would've probably believed it *was*.

I learned about vehicles and weapons, how computers work, retinal scanners, thermal crystals, electric generators, different types of drives, robots - anything and everything... it was a whole world I'd never known existed.

Actually, it technically doesn't exist... well, not in *this* world, anyway... we haven't invented it yet for ourselves. Mr Frog says there are seven dimensions: X,Y and Z are the first three - your location in space. Then there's Time, #4, and then there's Alternate Timelines (#5) and Parallel Universes (#6). Messing with the last three can be dangerous and create paradoxes and time loops (and is actually against interdimensional law, according to what I've read), but the final dimension is where Ballpoint and Parasol are located: space-time "bubbles". Basically, they're artificial universes. Mr Frog says it doesn't count as an actual dimension in his opinion, and ought to be classified as #5.1 instead of #7, but he's not in charge of that.

It felt like reading the best fairy tale ever.

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My structured schedule continued until one day after Mr Frog came back from his work. "Come here, stupid girl," he ordered, walking in the door with a small wooden bin. He cleared a space on one of his cluttered tables and sat it down. "Stupid girl" was his nickname for me, and he clearly felt I'd more than earned it. I was used to it by then, and there were a lot of worse things he could've called me, anyway.

I walked over curiously. "What's going on?" I asked, hoping he wouldn't take too long to explain. I badly wanted to get back to reading about particle physics.

As he spoke, he laid out several dark gray garments on the table, along with a couple pieces of computer equipment and some oddly shaped mechanical devices.

"I'm getting annoyed with the constant breaches in Spearbreakers security, and I fear it won't be long until Ballpoint launches an actual attack on me. I think...

I *think* you might be just about ready for the assignment. As a result, I'm sending you to Ballpoint Technologies." He didn't sound very sure of my abilities, and that didn't exactly help my confidence.

"Today?" I asked in dismay. Unlike him, I was *sure* I wasn't ready.

"Of course today, why else would I be bringing you this equipment?" was his terse reply. "I measured, and as I suspected, my old Ballpoint suit would be too large for you, even with adjustments made, so I had to custom-order a new one. Never mind where it came from."

"You *are* unusually tall for a dwarf," I noted with a mischievous smile.

He only grunted in displeasure. His height was a subject he didn't particularly enjoy, and his response could've almost been out of spite at my comment: "I'm going to have to give you a haircut. You clearly haven't had one in forever, and nobody's going to believe that you work for Ballpoint with it reaching halfway down your back, well-brushed or not."

I recoiled, backing away from him and putting my hands on my beanie as if to protect my hair. I'd been growing it since even before I was a teenager, and I was proud of how long it was. More importantly, I *really* didn't trust him with a pair of scissors. "No, you can't touch it!" I protested. "I'll just pin it all up under my beanie; nobody will notice!"

"You can't wear your beanie there," he retorted. He began to assemble a few pieces of machinery, tubes flopping about like tentacles. "People would notice you - hats aren't something normally seen at Ballpoint."

"Helmets are!" I argued, still adamant that he wouldn't touch my hair. "I read that on your computer. I'll wear a helmet, and you won't have to touch my hair!"

"Ha!" he said, unamused. "Only contractors and guards wear helmets, and Carena is a *spy*."

"But my ears!"

"Are something normally seen at Ballpoint - they have a number of elves employed, among other sharp-eared species," he finished for me, picking up the dark grey suit and holding it out with the command, "Go try this on."

Twisting my lip, I snatched it from him and stormed off to my room, closing the door behind me. As I slipped out of my lab clothes and into the suit, I tried to formulate some sort of plan to keep him from cutting my hair. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before I was more occupied with noticing how tight-fitting the Ballpoint clothes were: it seemed to hug my legs and body, and the fabric definitely wasn't made of pigtail fiber - it actually looked somewhat shiny. I'd never seen anything like it before; fabric wasn't something Mr Frog had wanted me to study.

Though the majority of the suit was a dark gray, the seams were dark blue. Several areas were reinforced on the inside (and that's as much as I'll go into that, in case Mr Frog reads this), but the sleeves at the lower arms were somewhat enlarged. In a show of defiance, I made sure I put my beanie back on before I left the room.

I walked back to him, feeling almost naked - when you wear heavier clothing and then wear something light, I guess you'd feel that way anyway, but it felt so... *alien*. It almost felt like I *wasn't* wearing anything, though in actuality, I was fully covered from my ankles all the way to my neck.

"Hold still," Mr Frog ordered, putting a hand on my arm to bring me to a halt. As he

walked around me, looking me over with a sort of bland approval, I felt color rise to my cheeks. "Excellent," he said dryly. "A perfect fit. Ballpoint spy suits are designed for agility, which you should find preferential. Come, follow me."

We walked over to the table with the wooden bin, and he turned, grabbing my right arm and holding it upwards as he inserted the tubed machinery into my sleeve. "I'm not sending you in there unarmed," he explained as he worked. "I tested this earlier today during a small goblin raid, though my dratted dwarven crossbow failed.

Shoddy manufacturing, I would say - during his reign, I warned Paintbrush Turkey not to draft the better mechanics - such as myself - into the army, but he stubbornly refused to comply."

"What is it?" I asked, as he inserted a second one into my left sleeve.

"It's an invention of mine. It pumps a sodium thiopental mixture through elastic tubing directly into the target's bloodstream, rendering them unconscious almost immediately. You *do* remember what sodium thiopental is, correct?"

It caught me off guard, and I wracked my brain to think of the answer. Sadly, I wasn't quick enough, and he pursed his lips in disapproval. "Stupid girl," he muttered. "Just make sure they're not already about to kill you when you use it, and you'll be fine. To fire, just flick your wrist upwards in the way that Spiderman does." "Who?"

Mr Frog grimaced. "Never mind." He lowered my arms and patted my sleeves to make sure it wasn't too obvious the weapons were there. "Just don't flick your wrist unless you're trying to knock someone out, and stand close to compensate for the limited range. Also, it's not very accurate."

I nodded absentmindedly, thinking. "Why don't you just use those tripwire dart traps you made, but without the tripwire?"

"Because, that -" he began, but stopped midsentence. I could almost see the gears whirring in his mind as he thought about it. "Actually... that might work..." he said slowly, nodding cautiously with a raised eyebrow. "I'll have to look into that... it would definitely solve the range and accuracy problems, but sodium thiopental wouldn't work quickly enough with the smaller dosage. Still, excellent idea, Vanya..." I smiled. His approval wasn't something I received often.

Suddenly he snatched the beanie from the top of my head, picking up a comb and pair of scissors from the table. "Now, let's get to work on that hair."

"No!" I begged. "Please, I'll just tuck it into the Ballpoint suit, nobody will notice!"

He actually laughed. "Ha! Contrary to your severely mistaken opinion, *everyone* would notice. Turn around."

And so Mr Frog cut my hair, mumbling to himself from time to time about how it "wasn't perfect yet", while my hair was steadily clipped shorter and shorter. It took him quite a while to be satisfied, during which I shed more than a single tear, but he finally, finally finished. "Just a few inches past the shoulders... It's actually passable, for my first attempt, I believe," he said proudly, walking around me and admiring his handiwork. The words "passable for my first attempt" brought a few extra tears to my eyes, and I dreaded seeing how I looked. I especially didn't want to look at the floor: I was afraid I'd break down if I saw how much he'd cut off. But he seemed pleased with it, stepping back and looking me over with a smile. He stood there for a moment, his eyes seeming to glaze over as if lost in thought, as if reliving a memory of a different time.

I felt my cheeks redden again as he looked me up and down. He noticed, and the smile vanished. "You're going to need to quit that infernal blushing. That, more than anything else, will give you away. Other than that, you look like a normal Ballpoint employee now. Nobody will give you as much as a second glance."

I was upset, and for good reason. He'd just cut away at one of the few things I'd

held dear. "How am I supposed to stop blushing?" I asked incredulously. "It's not exactly something I can control!"

"Incorrect!" he stated coldly, walking over to the little wooden bin. "*Everything* can be controlled with practice. Well -" Mr Frog halted suddenly, sporting a thoughtful expression. "*Actually*, typical dwarven stupidity might be an exception to that, but your blushing can be avoided simply by keeping your mind on your assignment.

You *do* remember everything I instructed you to do, yes?"

I nodded, and he walked back to me with a little card, putting it in my hand. I recognized what it was immediately - I'd studied it in one of the articles on Mr Frog's computer. It was an identification card; a forgery of Carena's real one, with *my* picture instead of hers. It had a very official appearance. Looking up again, I saw Mr Frog standing at his transdimensional portal, pulling levers and pressing buttons.

"Come on!" he urged. The wooden frame of the hoop telescoped into a tall oval, the air within appearing to coalesce and ripple like water, the same way as I'd seen when Carena herself had passed through. It wasn't without a twinge of fear that I thought about it: Just on the other side, it wasn't Spearbreakers anymore, but Ballpoint - enemy territory.

"Just step through when you're ready, but best to do it quickly," Mr Frog said loudly over the whirring, buzzing noise it produced. "Avoid retinal scanners if at all possible; they'll give you away immediately. I don't have schematics of their headquarters, but as far as I remember this should drop you right in the middle of the storage area! Just accomplish your objective and hurry back!" Saying this, he slipped a circular device off the console - a return portal activation bracelet. According to what I'd read, without it, I wouldn't be able to get back.

"What if I'm not ready??" I asked worryingly, slowly backing away from the rippling light. "I may *look* like a Ballpoint employee - in *your* opinion, anyway - but I don't know how to act like one!"

"Common sense, stupid girl! Common sense." he said reproachfully, walking over and grabbing my arm to pull me towards the portal. "Also, don't talk to anyone you don't have to. Now get through there before you terrify yourself through overthinking everything!"

He placed the bracelet in my hand, and sent me through the portal with a shove. For a moment, everything went black, and I felt a broken, twisting sensation, almost as if I was a pencil seen through a glass of water. Then, just as quickly, it was over, and I had my first glimpse of the inside of Ballpoint Technologies.



HANSLANDA:

Debriefing

Urist and Hans had already delivered the chest full of documents to Splint, when Feb came running up to them in the hallway outside the dining room, out of breath and shouting for their attention. The pair paused, giving Feb amused looks until he recovered enough air to speak somewhat normally. He said, "Mr Frog has gone through a few of the scrolls, and he wanted to see you at your convenience. 'e muttered something about debriefing you fellas."

Urist shrugged, and looked at Hans. Hans smiled at him blankly and shrugged. Urist looked at Feb more than a little bit contemptuously, and sighed, "Alright. Where is

he at?"

In the Mechanic's workshops, Urist and Hans felt rather out of place. The walls were piled high with strange gears, sprockets, and other, less identifiable devices. The table in the center of the room had several unfinished mechanisms on it, odd looking things to be sure. Urist couldn't tell how the mechanism would be attached, how it would work, or even what exactly its component parts were, but the effectiveness of mechanisms could easily be attested to by anyone who had been to the spiked walkways during the undead or spawn sieges.

There was a couple mechanics sitting on some chairs off to one side, drinking from their mugs, obviously on break. Mr Frog was nowhere to be seen at the moment.

Urist sighed again, and said to Hans, "I thought Feb said he was down here."

"I am. My mug ran dry." Mr Frog's voice echoed from behind them, and Urist jumped just a little. Hans turned, unconcernedly. Mr Frog held a surprisingly plain mug of gabbro in one hand, and in his other hand was a sheaf of scrolls. He cleared off the mechanic's table unceremoniously, sending half-finished mechanisms spilling to the ground, and laid out his papers on the table. Mr Frog took a sip from his mug, and pointed to a specific paper, "This is a translation of much of these scrolls. It has some... Very interesting implications for me. More specifically, it has some rather immediate implications for you two."

Hans held up his hand, then said, "What's an implication?"

Mr Frog gave the big half-wit a half-hearted glare, and continued without answering the question, "As I was saying, these papers make it even clearer than it already was that some... Outside forces are plotting the downfall of this fortress. I do not refer to our primitive goblin friends. These scrolls make several references to 'gods', but the descriptions of the gods' powers are in keeping with highly advanced technology." Mr Frog started to continue, then looked up at the two soldiers' bewildered expressions. He closed his eyes briefly, and took a deep breath. "Regardless of your understanding or not, I will require the services of both of you. You have proven to be able warriors, you are both incredibly expendable to the fortress, and you both could easily be disguised as higher ups with a bit of effort on my part."

Urist narrowed his eyes, "Higher ups? Advanced technology? What in all the madness of hell are you talking about?"

Mr Frog smiled icily, and said, "It will all become clearer with time. But for now, I'd like you to meet with the third member of your party. She will be able to explain a great many of the things you are confused about."

Urist and Hans turned as a door opened, to reveal Vanya.

She smiled hugely upon seeing the pair of them, and rushed to give them a hug.

Mr Frog said dryly, "Strange, I never get that response from her." His smile vanished, and he said, "I will be expecting the three of you in my room tomorrow morning, as the sun rises. You don't have much of the day left, so I would recommend you get some sleep soon." He turned and strode from the room, his cloak billowing gently.

TALVIENO:

More of V's Story: Enemy Territory

This is a quality hard-bound journal. On the item is an image of a five-pointed star in imitation gold leaf. The star is glinting on the cover. The image relates to the

painting of a star in imitation gold leaf on the cover of Vanya's third journal, "The Journal of Employment", in the early spring of 207. This item menaces with sheets of parchment.

Instants after materializing in another universe, I almost fell off a ledge. Despite Mr Frog's "superior intellect", I almost died, and I'd only just gotten there. Leaning back with my arms to regain my balance, I sat down carefully to avoid falling, and took a good look around. I was sitting on a narrow, perforated steel walkway, at what seemed to be fifty feet above a massive garage area. Parked below me were rows upon rows of tanks and trucks - vehicles that required neither yak nor horse to move. Scattered among them I could see a good number of Ballpoint employees wandering about their business, unaware that I sat high above, watching. It felt impossibly bizarre to be seeing these things firsthand, as I'd only learned of their existence a few weeks before. It actually felt akin to a dream - one of those strange ones where you wake up and think, "Where did all *that* weird stuff come from?"

I tried to take it all in, assuring my disbelieving mind that it *was* real, and I *wasn't* imagining things, but that only seemed to make it worse. Lightheaded, I tried to stand and stumble back to the portal, but unhappily discovered that it'd already closed.

I was on my own.

The garage looked old and battle-worn, with scorch marks, rust, and bullet indentations adorning the iron walls. Everything was out in the open - the metal crossbeams, vent pipes, even electrical cables - it had a very utilitarian feel to it. Girders adorned the ceiling above me, and framework steel pillars stretched downwards from them to the floor.

Without warning, the huge wall to my right began to transform, and I jumped in startlement, almost falling off my perch. The wall seemed to wash itself away, revealing a grim, dark landscape, dotted with dead and rotting trees and scattered magma flows. I stared at the dismal scene in amazement, guessing that I was gazing through a portal, hundreds of times bigger than any I'd ever read about. As I watched, several of the vehicles below me started, driving out of the garage and into that other, strange world - which honestly looked much homelier than Spearbreakers'. Then, just as quickly as it had opened, the great doorway closed again, and all that was left was a great, blank wall.

I made up my mind then to get moving. I had no idea where I was, I was terrified, bewildered, and awestruck all at once, and at the same time, I knew I had to hurry... it wasn't a good combination for me, but it made me very, very badly want to get home. I couldn't do that until I accomplished my mission. What complicated things the most was the fact that Mr Frog obviously hadn't put me where he'd wanted to. Slipping on the little bracelet he'd shoved unceremoniously into my hand, I started forwards along the walkway, heading away from the portal wall and hoping I was going the right direction.

As I reached the end, a metal door split in the middle, sliding apart and revealing a long hallway. After hesitating for a moment, I walked through, worried they might slam shut as I came between them... but no such thing happened. The hallway on the other side looked newer than the garage, its metal surfaces free of rust or dent, and somehow it felt even more alien.

I was inside Ballpoint, wholly and utterly alone.

As I walked cautiously through the trapezoidal corridor, trying not to stare at the

bare electric lights that lined the sides, I tried to plan what my next move would be. *"Get to the storage warehouses as quickly as possible,"* I remembered Mr Frog instructing me. *"All the buildings are connected by concrete-covered walkways due to the radiation-contaminated environment outside, so you shouldn't have to worry about finding the right one."* The problem was, I had no idea *where* I was, or how to even *get* to the storage warehouses.

Ahead of me, the corridor split, and a helmeted guard walked in my direction, a gun clearly visible in his hands. It was the first gun I'd ever seen, and it immediately put me on edge... but even worse, he seemed to notice my uneasiness.

"State your business!" he ordered, quickening his pace. "This is a restricted area!"

He wore full armor: dark gray, thick, ribbed stuff that caught light rather than reflecting it, likely made out of materials I'd never even heard of. It didn't look as strong as adamantine, but it looked a lot lighter than steel.

For a moment I stood dumbstruck in terror, sure he was going to kill me. As his words slowly registered in my mind, I pulled out the little ID card and held it up to him. "I'm Vanya Carena," I managed, "I guess the portal put me in the wrong place." I tried to act casual, but inside, I was trembling.

With armored fingers, he took the identification card carefully from my hand and looked at it through his black-glassed visor. After what seemed ages, he glanced back at my face. "Vanya Carena, Level 3 spy?"

I nodded, swallowing. "I was wondering if you could help me... I'm trying to get to the storage district, and I'm not too sure where I am."

"No problem, little mix ups like this happen on occasion." He handed my ID card back and pointed behind him with his weapon. "Keep going that way, sweetheart, first corridor to the right, and just keep walking."

I smiled, almost sighing with relief. "Thank you so much," I said gratefully. I hadn't expected him to be so friendly.

As I passed him and continued down the hallway, I could almost feel his eyes on me. I'm not sure if it was my imagination or not, but when I reached the corner and turned, I thought I heard him wolf whistle...

The corridor continued onwards, occasionally turning or splitting at an intersection. It should've been more than enough time to calm my beating heart, but the chance meeting with the guard had fully impressed upon me just how much danger I was in by simply being at Ballpoint Tech, and I was even more worried about my safety than before. If it hadn't been for the cooled air of the tunnels, I'm sure I would've been sweating.

Finally the trapezoidal hallway ended at a door. As I approached, it slid open, and I almost cried out in dismay at what I saw.

It was a giant open area like the garage, but instead of vehicles, I saw row after row of short, square buildings, separated by empty walkways. Through the door of the nearest I could see several bunk beds and cabinets lined up against the walls.

Among the buildings, soldiers milled around in their dark gray armor, going about their business. If the guard I'd passed could be trusted, I was going to have to walk right down the middle of it all.

Biting my lip, I took a deep breath and started through the door, encouraging myself as best I could with Mr Frog's words: *"You look like a normal Ballpoint employee now. Nobody will give you as much as a second glance."*

It soon became clear that this wasn't the case.

As I walked forwards, holding my head high and trying to act like I had a reason to be there, I heard men whispering among themselves as I passed, and occasionally they laughed rowdily after I'd gone. I felt it was at me, but I made up my mind to

ignore it and hurry to the other side of the room, just to get it all over with. I tried to imagine that they always did that, and that it wasn't at me at all, but the occasional whistle I heard wasn't helping my self-imposed illusion... and then something happened that put the possibility of coincidence completely out of my mind.

Just as I neared the other side of the room, I jumped as I felt someone roughly slap my behind. My first impression was again that I wasn't wearing anything, and I felt color rushing to my face, but this time it wasn't simply embarrassment - it was partially out of anger. I spun and found myself looking at the grinning face of a muscled soldier.

"Hey, baby," he crooned with a wink, as if his behavior was perfectly acceptable.

"Wanna go out and get a drink after my shift?" Behind him, his buddies laughed and elbowed each other.

My hand moved to where he'd hit me as I stared at him in openmouthed shock. I could hardly believe anyone could be so rude. "Of course I don't!" I managed to gasp out, backing away from him and his group.

He grinned wider, as if he enjoyed my reaction. "Oh ho ho, playing hard to get, are we? Daddy *likes*." He approached me, giving me a dirty look amidst his comrades' encouraging jeers.

I continued backing away, scared out of my wits for my safety. I was unsure of what to say or do, and sweating in earnest now. Mr Frog hadn't said anything like this could happen - he'd said *nobody* would notice me; that I wouldn't stand out at all. I'd rather have shoved myself into *any* little tunnel than go through something like this, and I was hyperventilating with fear, afraid of what they'd do to me.

It wasn't long before I found myself backed against a wall, as my antagonists slowly closed in, inappropriately casting their eyes over my body.

"And what's a pretty girl like you doing in our neck of the woods, hm?" the man asked rhetorically with a deliberate lick of the lips. "Love that sexy getup. Mmm, mmm, mmm."

"Get away from me!" I cried out loudly in a panic, swatting away one of their hands.

"Don't touch me! Get away!"

My cries were answered by a yell to my left. "Hey, leave her alone!"

The soldiers backed up a few steps, craning their necks to look past each other in the direction of the voice. Between them I could see a heavily-armored female approaching at a brisk pace. "Get away from her boys, you heard her," she said with a roll of her eyes.

With some grumbling, they obeyed, turning and ambling away, chuckling to themselves and stealing glances at me over their shoulders.

I relaxed my tensed muscles a bit, closing my eyes and breathing an actual sigh of relief. My heartbeat still raced, but at least it was over. I almost broke down and started crying.

"Hey, you all right?" my savior asked, and I looked up at her face. She was human, clearly, and she looked a little amused. The collar of her dark-gray armor sported a name in white letters: Bugi. "Not smart for you to be wandering around in here. Carena, right?"

I hesitated for a moment. "That's right... Do you recognize me?"

"I've seen you once or twice," she replied. "A girl like you tends to stand out around here. When I've seen you, you seemed to like the extra attention, but I guess we all have our bad days, right?"

I nodded in response. This was *really* not a good day for me.

"Thought so," she said with a knowing look. Then curiosity stole over her face, and she asked, "What are you doing down here in the barracks, anyway?"

"I was just passing through," I explained, shrugging.

Bugi raised an eyebrow at me. "Passing through? Barracks dead end, honey."

"What??" I exclaimed in surprise. "I thought I was going towards the storage district... I asked a guard, and he -"

She interrupted me with muffled laughter. "Heheheh! Could've guessed. Yeah, somebody played a little prank on you. Storage district, you say?"

"That's right," I answered. "I'm honestly a little lost..."

"Happens to the best of us." It sounded like a conversational lie, but her words following it heartened me: "I think I could spare a few minutes to get you pointed in the right direction - sound good?"

I smiled with real joy: right in the middle of enemy territory, I'd found a real friend, like a ray of sunshine in a darkened cave. "Yes, and thank you! ...and thank you for keeping those men off of me."

She was already walking back the way I'd come, motioning for me to follow. "Not a problem, honey!" she said over her shoulder, and I hurried after her to keep pace.

As we walked back through the barracks, huge lights among the scaffolding twenty feet above casting faint shadows between the low buildings, no one dared stop us or even whistle. Apparently Bugi had earned a great deal of respect from the men: a single glare from her was all it took to send them slinking back into the shadows. For the first time since I'd arrived, I felt safe.

She moved quickly, taking powerful strides with her longer legs. I had to rush to keep up with her, and it wasn't long before we reached the end of the barracks, choosing a different corridor than the one I'd entered through. The tubular lights on the walls seemed to fly by with a purpose as we turned through different intersections; Bugi knew the hallways well.

Finally, she stopped, and I almost bumped into her. "Far as I'm taking you, Carena," she said, turning to me. "Warehouse is just up ahead and to your left, can't miss it." This said, she turned and left at an equally brisk pace.

I'd hardly remembered my manners before she was already turning the corner.

"Thank you!" I called after her, but I wasn't sure she even heard. She wasn't doing it for thanks or profit, but only for the principle - like a true friend. For a moment I regretted that I'd never see her again, but that faded away as it was replaced by new worries: I wouldn't stand a chance without Bugi if there were soldiers in the warehouse, and they treated me the same as the ones in the barracks had.

A memory of Urist's voice came unbidden to my mind: *"Fear doesn't make you weak. Courage is doing something brave, even when you're scared. Being afraid keeps you sharp - it keeps you alive."* Maybe I'd never see him again, but he still had a special place in my heart. He *always* would. If you really care about someone, you never stop.

I had to be *brave*. "If not for me, then for Urist," I whispered, and my own words seemed to bring me confidence as I heard them.

Gritting my teeth, I stepped forwards firmly with all the purpose of a charging bull, my eyes fixed on a point at the end of the hallway. Mr Frog wanted his PEA, and Armok be damned if he wasn't going to get it.

If Urist could've seen me, I'm sure he would've been proud.

I turned the corner to the left and found myself facing an open area. At the far wall was a row of closed double doors, patrolled by a single guard who was walking away from me down the line. As the guard passed in front of the doors, they didn't open like the others at Ballpoint had, and I realized they must be either locked or opened

manually. I halted for a moment, then stepped forwards, my dark boots clipping across the floor as I walked forwards. I'd shoved everything else out of my mind; I was going to succeed for Urist.

And then my thoughts began to wander... one of the hazards of thinking of the one you care most about. I began to fantasize about what would happen if I succeeded: maybe Mr Frog would allow me to leave, and I could go and be with Urist again... My mind was still half on my fantasies when I tapped the guard on the shoulder from behind.

The guard turned to me. "Yes?" It was a female's voice, though coarse. "Do you need assistance?"

I nodded. "I need to get in there," I told her, pointing at the row of doors. "Do you think you could help?" I was on a roll - nothing could stop me...

...Except for her response. "Where's your access key?" she asked expectantly. It threw me completely for a loop, and my mind slowly drifted from my castles in the clouds to the present situation as I puzzled over what she'd said. "Acc... Access key?"

"Yeah, your access key." Her voice took on a suspicious tone. "It's required for entrance... Don't you know that?"

"I..." I paused, lost for words. My eyes glanced away at the row of locked doors, bordered by little pads of buttons. "I... It's my first time being sent down here..."

"Key's required for entrance, inserted in a keypad. Can't get in otherwise." She sounded extremely suspicious now, and I could imagine her eyes narrowing at me from behind her visor. "Who sent you down?"

I didn't have an answer. "Um... I... I don't know, someone told me to retrieve something for them and bring it back." I knew I wasn't a good liar, and she could probably tell. I was beginning to panic, fright clutching at me and forming into a knot in my throat.

She shook her head, light glinting on her helmet. "That's against company protocol. What's your operating number? And what's your name? I have to report this."

"Report it??" I exclaimed in shock. I was trapped - hopelessly ensnared. Thoughts poured through my mind as my train of thought crossed from one rail to the next. There was no way I'd be able to escape, and even if I tried to run, she'd be more than capable of gunning me down. I'd never see Urist again, I'd never see Spearbreakers - I'd never even see *Mr Frog* again, and I honestly preferred seeing him again than the possibility of torture, or worse, imprisonment with Ballpoint offenders. If sexual harassment was overlooked at Ballpoint as normal, I couldn't imagine what terrible crimes someone would have to commit to be considered a *criminal*. The men in the barracks hadn't given it a second thought, and nobody would've stopped them if I hadn't cried out for help.

Suddenly an idea sprang forth from my bewildered mind. It was sketchy at best, I knew, and my voice faltered as I spoke. "Why would you have to report it?" I asked her plaintively. "Isn't this the barracks? I'm just supposed to be fetching a helmet from someone's bunk!"

The moment it was out of my mouth, I was sure it would never work, but contrary to that belief, it did.

She laughed rudely. "Barracks? You're new here, then." She grabbed my shoulder and spun me around, pointing back the way I'd come. "They're that way, kid.

Somebody just pranked you. I'd do it, too... if I was off-duty." Her voice took on a cruel, boisterous tone as she said this last, and she shoved me forwards roughly.

"Now get on out. Learn to use maps, kid."

I was safe, but also devastated. As I walked back through the hallways, it wasn't long before I realized I was also utterly lost - there was no way I'd be able to figure out how to get back to Bugi, much less the garage. I tried finding a set of stairs to get to the roof, but I found nothing but corridor after corridor, their ribbed walls sloping inwards towards the ceiling. Finally I gave up, wandering aimlessly about the Ballpoint infrastructure, wondering how I'd ever escape. A few times I passed a guard, but with my head downcast they took little notice of me, walking by without so much as a glance. I was walking in circles, and I knew it, but I didn't know how to stop.

After a time, I remembered the bracelet Mr Frog had put into my hand, and I looked at my wrist - it was still there. Though I hated to go back empty-handed, I didn't see what else there was I could do. I'd done my very best, I figured; Mr Frog had simply expected too much from me.

After all the guards were out of sight, I slipped the lightweight device off my hand and held it up, pressing the little silver button on the side. As I watched, the air inside the empty circle rippled with a quiet, high-pitched buzzing sound. It was sending my coordinates back to Mr Frog's portal - it was an old invention of his, and he'd explained how it worked. Unfortunately, moments later, the bracelet quieted, and the air within it stilled.

I freaked out. "It *broke?!?*" I exclaimed in dismay. "How could it *break?!?* Now I'll *never* be able to leave, and -"

My panicking was interrupted by a quiet hum, as the air before me shivered, shuddering into a mirroring pool of water, ovoid and reaching almost to the ceiling. I stared at it for a minute, open-mouthed, my last words hanging in the air. "...Oh," I managed, feeling stupid. I stepped through it almost eagerly, unafraid of the strange twisting sensations this time. I was ready to go home.

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"Are you serious?" Mr Frog was fuming with rage, pacing rapidly about the room like a growing thundercloud. "Stupid, stupid girl! You accomplished *nothing!* Did you not bother to consider pickpocketing a key before you blithely ran away, ecstatic with the expectation of returning to your squalid little world? Skulkers are thieves by nature; no complications should have existed during your assignment!"

"We'll just try again!" I insisted. "I'll do better next time, I promise!"

"There might not even be a 'next time'! With your notably abnormal behavior they could possibly detain you for questioning and mental examination if I send you there again!"

"I could've gotten sexually assaulted in the barracks!" I cried out in protest, tears in my eyes. I'd never seen him so angry before. "You said nobody would notice me, but *everybody* did! *Everybody* was looking at me, and it's all because of this ridiculous suit you made me wear!"

"It's Ballpoint protocol for employed spies to wear that same highly dexterous apparel! Now cease bemoaning your previous plight, it's irrelevant!"

"Just because *you* don't have any concept of sexuality doesn't mean -" I stopped in fright as Mr Frog stormed over to where I stood, his lips twisting threateningly with a controlled wrath as he glared in contempt, towering above me.

Mr Frog stopped, his face inches from mine. With his furrowed brow, bushy beard and well-trimmed hair, he looked fiercer than a wild elephant as he spoke slowly, threateningly: "Don't *ever* question my character again."

I stared at him in terror, biting my lip and trying to back away, but he grabbed my arm and held me close to keep me still. My arm began to ache from his firm grip - I

felt my hand going numb as in a low voice, he growled an ominous warning: "It will be the last mistake you make."

I heard myself whimper in fear, and he shoved me away roughly in disgust, turning away. I stumbled backwards, tripping over my boots and falling to the ground as he stalked towards the door, his hands clasped behind his cloak. It was only then that I remembered: Ballpoint had questioned his character, and he'd left them; he'd made them regret it. There must be something in his past... someone he cared about who'd accused his character, maybe. *Something* must've made him that way, and for a moment, I wanted to understand who he really was.

My thoughts were broken as he turned to me abruptly, his hands still clasped behind his back. "Put on some regular clothing. We're going somewhere tonight." His voice was calm again - almost portentous.

I got to my feet in surprise. "Going somewhere?? We've never gone anywhere before..."

"No, we haven't," he agreed. "But tonight will be different. I had a second plan in case you didn't succeed, though I didn't expect you to fail so miserably. Nevertheless, it needs to be put into effect."

I looked away. If he'd meant for me to feel ashamed, it'd worked. "What?" I asked, prompting him. "What is it?"

"None of your concern," he said in a slightly raised voice, unclasping his hands and heading for the door. "Meet me in the workshops in precisely twenty minutes, and make sure your ears are covered." With this, he left, closing the door behind him.

The suit was a bit of a pain to get back out of, but I finally managed, folding it and putting it away. Before long I was fully dressed in my normal clothes, ready to leave. I checked the clock on the wall - dwarves didn't make clocks, but Mr Frog had taught me to read them anyway - I still had five minutes.

I left Mr Frog's laboratory with a quickened step, trying to get to the workshops before the five minutes were up. Unlike him, I didn't own a wristwatch, but I thought I could estimate the passing of time well enough on my own.

A few minutes later, I arrived, opening yet another one of the many doors and walking in amidst the hustle and bustle of dwarves going about their work. It wasn't long before I spotted Mr Frog, sitting at a table with two other dwarves.

My heart skipped a beat as I realized who they were: it was Urist and Hans! A giant smile broke over my face - it was by far the best thing that'd happened all day, and possibly all week! I rushed over and threw my arms around them in delight - first Urist, then Hans, and they returned my embraces gladly.

"Strange," Mr Frog said dryly, sipping from his mug, "I never get that response from her. I must assume you are already on friendly terms, unless all elves are that enthusiastic about meeting dwarves." He glared at me icily for a moment, as if reminding me he hadn't forgotten about my little misadventure. "I'll be expecting the three of you in my room tomorrow morning, as the sun rises. You don't have much of the day left, so I would recommend you get some sleep soon." Then, he stood and left, his cloak billowing gently behind him as it caught the musty air.

I turned back to Urist. "I'd thought I wouldn't see you again - I'm so glad you're doing all right!" I exclaimed. He smiled, and I felt myself melting in his gaze.

"It is good to see you, too," he responded with a smile.

"Glad t'see ya in such high spirits, missus!" Hans said with a nod. "Mr Frog's been explainin' some stuff to us - he said you might oughta explain it a little better."

I looked at them curiously - first one, then the other, searching their faces for answers - I didn't understand what they meant.

Urist seemed to notice. "Mr Frog said we would be on a mission together. He implied you would be better able to teach us." He raised an eyebrow at me.

I blushed and looked away, embarrassed. "Mr Frog's not a very good teacher, no," I said. Then, as the rest of what he'd said sank in, my eyes widened, and I gaped at him in disbelief. "Wait, a mission together?? Both - all three of us??"

In response to my question, Urist nodded. I laughed with joy and excitement, my voice ringing clearly through the halls of the mighty fortress. I felt blissful - bliss is the only word that could describe it.

Urist smiled at my joy, and told me, "That is what he said. He also mentioned disguises and advanced technology... Do you know what he could mean?"

I hesitated for a moment, but then realized that Mr Frog had clearly wanted me to sum up my knowledge. If I was going on a mission with Urist and Hans back to Ballpoint, they would need to know quite a few things so they understood what was going on. I was so excited; I hardly knew where to begin. "All right," I started, calming my self down, though the smile never went away, "First, you're going to need to ignore everything you think you know about science, and keep an open mind..."

I knew right then that I would *love* being a teacher.



### **(ASEAHERU):**

Stone INC. a mining company turned mercenary group when they uncovered, well, *something* that they destroyed most of them. Warding off a attack of these *things* they were granted a obscene quantity of mountainous wilderness where they, along with there families vanished. Soon, however, things appeared along the boarder. Walls. Towers. Dwarves armed with strange weapons. Craft flying beyond the world. Great monsters of iron and steel belching smoke. And then *they* returned, along with the dreaded foes. Those who had arrived before traded with the peoples of the land. But now the returned with weapons. Those created by the "Stoners" as they were called mostly died in there hands. The HS united the warring factions, for a time. it became for a Ballpoint dwarf alongside a Parasol trooper holding Stone INC weapons fighting *them* together. When the HS were removed, they stayed, and turned there weapons on each other. And when they left, then the brave Dwarves of Stone INC, clad in new armor, with new weapons, in vehicles that *floated* without blade or wing, left. Legend said that the left to fight the HS elsewhere.

### **(SPLINT):**

I'll just remind everyone, Everoc is the continent the great tales of old hail from, brought to a larger continent to the west by seafaring merchants. After the fall of Syruptleaf (I based this bit off of the accounts of visits to the ruins) most of the continent that was Everoc was left a barren hellscape, the humans of the coast on



that land being the only survivors. As they had not the supplies or tools to make the journey west, these fishermen and undersupplied merchants stayed, eventually settling in the mountains high above the spawn infested plains and valleys.

When they got the chance, using cavern wood and captured foreign ships, they fled their home, corrupted from humans into the black-hided and magically inert barbarians of the east we now know. Yes, the Global Coalition saw these strangers as not but pillagers and slavers, but at the time they had a far worse problem with the rise of the fanged ones. Thus the barbarians eked out a small empire for themselves in the mountains along the coast, enslaving, killing, or displacing the humans and dwarves there. However, they stopped their conquest and turned back to the sea to meet their pursuers, deciding that this new land didn't deserve the horror following them and thus tried to stem the demonic tide alone, resulting in the barbarians eventually being reduced to fractious raiding bands around the time the vampires were nearly exterminated.

The dwarves, with their damned pride, viewed this as just another nuisance that needed nothing but raw dwarven might to be crushed, with Spearbreakers being one of many fortresses to be established by monarchical order as training ground to raise new armies to fight this new string of enemies. Humans, goblins, and elves likewise decided they could crush those that met them alone, and the Global Coalition disbanded, resulting in the wars and other politics we currently suffer, with each nation bearing great military strength, but not enough to stamp out the spawn alone, and none of them wish to share the glory.

As a result there are countless battles being waged in this new massive continent (we're just along the northern coast!) many heroes like our poor auxilia member Sus, become forgotten quickly, while necromancers see these wars as a chance to either make a name and an empire for themselves, or in some cases simply regain their right to live amongst their fellows again by turning their undead armies on the invaders or other necromancers.

This has become a world of heroes, human, goblin, elf, necromancer, dwarf, and barbarian, all forgotten in the winds of war. Remember this:

For every warrior that receives a battle honor, becomes a great lord, or passes into legend, thousands more die unmourned and unremembered. And yet those unknown warriors fight on, knowing that no statues will rise, no poems will be written, or songs will be sung for them.

And in a short time, nearly all forgotten. Even our own heroes, when this fortress falls, will be quickly left behind, with only the ruins of Lokumokab as proof they were ever real.

## **DRACONIK\_SANKIS:**

Personal Log: Draconik Sankis  
Head of Bio-Weapons Division Parasol Corp.

Entry 1:

I have prepared this series of logs for my upcoming travel to "Spearbreakers" a few of the corporations agents are already embedded and should make my tasks easier in the long run as my tasks as well as my... Condition will make even some basic tasks... difficult to say the least. They have also informed me of a few possible hindrances present at this "mountain-home" my tasks will have me either avoiding or preferably neutralizing these pests.

Here is the Following list of... Hindrances, in order of importance.

1: Mr Frog: a Fellow scientist and traveler but member of our Rival, Ballpoint Inc, although this fact alone merits his...downfall, I will prefer a means of Non-Fatal and only Semi-Permanent damage. Although I do not except the same as him, however perhaps he can be of... use in development of a stronger toxin to deal with this... Condition.

2: Fischer: One of the keystones in Spearbreakers military even being able to do practically anything to HS-2 subjects and if case studies I conduct in field prove true HS-X subjects as well. Fischer will only be allowed continued function while I stay at this "Bastion" afterwards and after collection of DNA sampling subject shall be permanently dealt with [Side Note: Excellent test candidate for Mutagen research if agents are trustworthy.]

3: Splint: Although the Title of "Overseer" passes down from Year to Bloody Year Splint has been identified as the true "Leader" of Spearbreakers and thus falls along side Fischer in the need to be eliminated after my departure. Although Method shall differ greatly, with aid from subject four.

4: Talvi: Agents have reported the breakdown of mental processes of the First "Overseer" and how she believes herself to be a "Cavy". Given her "Friendship" with Mr Frog goes DNA-Tampering is not out of the question and could have possible neurotoxin benefits, Subject 3 shall be the ...hehehe "Cavy" haha to such formulas. Subject four however shall be evacuated along with me for... Future testing.

5: Mitch: Extermination required due to tampering with my agents and our well-oiled machine called "Hospital" hehe. Also required because of all the Overseers he actually increased effectiveness 315.64% Fortress wide... DNA Sampling for Middle Management clones is strongly recommended.

And As a Reminder to Myself, in case of needing to activate clones here are my tasks. Once again in Order of Importance.

1: Acquire HS-2 Dwarf Sample. Difficulty Level: None: Spearbreakers HOUSES several former dwarves turned into HS-2 or even better HS-X.

2: Acquire Proof and Sample of HS-X. DL: Hard to estimate given level of information gathered and available at OMEGA-Level Clearances.

3: Gather Temporal Stability information of Spearbreakers: With Mr Frog's process we must know how much temporal traffic passes through Spearbreakers, Where it passes through and most importantly WHO.

4: Gather Genetics Data on Residents: Most likely the dullest part but maybe Mr Frog has spiced up these... primitives.

5: Evacuation Protocol - 13-718-666-Delta9 Subvariant Echo-13 aside from that company standard. [Higher ups recommend due to temporal tampering a 37-gigaton nuclear device... I'm preferring something smaller than that sledgehammer though just AS deadly... if not more so.

\*Entry Encryption Omega-Level Access Required\*

Draconik Stood from his Personal Mobile Work-Station and nearly doubled over in a coughing fit, as it passed he poured a thick clotting red substance from a nearby crystal decanter into a blood stained golden goblet before downing the contents of the goblet in one mighty gulp, his laboured breathing eased as his red eyes stared at

the painting of his forbearer, "Damn this Armok given curse on our noble line" He muttered as he readjusted the red spectacles and rising to his full height of a dwarf and three quarters, he double checked his gear packed away the MWS, triple checked his gear and lugging the stuffed pack, headed for the Temporal gateway. Now all he needed was to slip into Spearbreakers and keep a low profile... as low as one His size could anyway.

## XAHNEL:

### **Rose's Journal**

You find a journal carefully placed in the crook of a tree branch, just near the old fortress of Spearbreakers. You open it. Inside is a single word in the space given for the owner's name. Rose.

#### 1 Felsite

The Dented Deserts. Not exactly the nicest place to live, though I grew up here. It's why I'm leaving. I've nabbed this journal to keep track of what happens, in case I die, or get lost, or kidnapped, or something. It's been known to happen, with the friggin raiders in these dunes. Heard of a Fortress, called Spearbreakers. More specifically, heard of its... special friends, the Spawn of Holistic. I've never seen one myself, probably because the damn things are very, very focused on taking out that Fortress. However, they are the reason I'm leaving. See, I've always had a bit of a hero thing. 'S why I've taken up hammer training. I'm good enough to get lucky, nothing to brag about. My shadow thinks leaving is a good idea, too. No one else knows this, because if people knew my shadow could think, I'd get locked up for being crazy. Well, enough stalling. I'll update this journal tonight. Gotta get walking.

I got attacked by a sand raider. Caved his skull, stole his food and water, in case I need it. Never was a fan of fried desert lizard, but, I gotta eat something. By the time I leave I might get a taste for it, since these lizards are the commonest animal out here, and I don't think cactus meat is very filling. Speaking of cactuses, note to self, keep next raider alive long enough to learn how to tap them for drinks. Second note: Ration alcohol, so I can remain functional while sober. I love booze, but I despise being dependant on anything. I might even make it a challenge of toughness; see how long I can survive sober. It will only make me stronger. If I can operate sober, I won't have to worry about beer shortages, either, and I'll be the best equipped to survive.

Question for further consideration: How well does cactus juice ferment? Can it be brewed, and if so, what are the effects? Look into this at some point. How easy/hard is it to cultivate cactuses outside of a desert environment, or in a cave/underground fortress?

#### 2 Felsite

No raiders today. I killed a lizard, and I'm frying it up for dinner. Not sure how to do it right, but I've got to eat, even if I make myself sick doing it. I am about half sober right now, and the effect is... interesting, to say the least. Things around me seem to move at a quicker pace. Either they have sped up, or I've slowed down. Mentally, as well as physically. I would bet I've got slurred speech, but I haven't had reason to talk. I hope no raiders show up until my body becomes accustomed to this low level

of booze. Otherwise they might kill me.

Question for further consideration: Why, as a species, are dwarves not only addicted to drinking, but physically require it to remain healthy? Is Armok just fucking with us? Or is there some nutrient in booze that we can't get anywhere else? I'll write in this again when something happens.

#### 16 Felsite

Something happened. It's been about two weeks, and I've weaned myself off of the booze some more, drinking about a quarter of what I normally would. That little portable still I made is coming in handy, as the cactus juice makes a very flavorful beer. I've started regaining some of my cognitive senses, so, perhaps we dwarves don't truly need it, but have just become so accustomed to having it, it makes us extremely put out when we don't have any. Or I'm not fully dwarf, which I admit is entirely possible, as my mom was a bit of a whore. Anyways, on to the something. I've found my way out of the desert, and I'm in some plains. Dunno what they are called, and I don't care. I've taken the time to make extra booze. Glad I started the rationing; otherwise I'd be forced to by this, as there are too few usable fruits. It's nice to know I'm still half competent when I'm not healthily drunk, but I'll be happy to go back to a full supply. As a challenge of toughness, it's a hard one. I keep getting tempted to drink more than my ration, but every time, my shadow helps talk me out of it. I don't care what others say, for a blob of darkness, he's a cool guy. I've changed my mind about going fully off the booze, but, I've still got a ways to go, and may have to do without anyways. Gonna go to sleep soon.

Question for further consideration: What the hell is with elves? Most dwarves know how to piss em off, and do just that for shits and giggles, but why IS it that they get so upset about the trees? Maybe they need the trees for something. The way they act when you try to sell any wood to them reminds me of that time one of the dwarves in my fortress got a mood while he was pissed off and killed a dwarf for making into furniture, then gave it to the dead one's family. Same expression, almost. Going to sleep, gonna walk more. Write if there is something interesting. Reminder for morning: see about getting some seeds from the cactuses.

Question for even further consideration: If I am half dwarf, does that mean I'm immune to drunkenness when both sober AND when consuming large amounts of brew? Considering how scrawny I am compared to the average dwarf, it makes more sense than our lord and creator screwing with us. I'll ask him after my inevitable death.

#### 23 Felsite

New events, journal, and whoever is reading this off my mangled corpse/in the treasure horde of whatever killed me/picked up off the ground. It's been a week since I wrote last. I've found some woods. Got some cactus seeds a while back. There are elves in these woods, I met some earlier. They made some short cracks, but they also gave me some booze in exchange for my cactus seeds after I told them how good the fermented milk was, so that puts em in my good books. I figure they'll start growing the cactuses, and selling the booze to dwarves for metalworks and trinkets. Good idea on their part, but it won't last, if I can get more seeds in some way. Then Spearbreakers will be the first fortress to perfect Cactus Milk Beer. Then we'll show up the elves at the game of sales. Found some fruit, some apples, so I got my mini still making hard cider out of them. The elves don't mind if I just use the fruit, right?

Possible answer to previous Question: The elves need trees to propagate the species. I'll keep this idea to myself, because, honestly, most dwarves would try some pretty sick shit (this coming from me) on elves, and they are still in my good books. Maybe

I'll tell if they piss me off. If this is accurate, it explains why they act like you killed their mother and decorated something with her bones and tried to sell it to them. Note to self: See about possibility of befriending a female elf, and asking these questions to one who knows. I hope no dwarf sees this... I'd get called a traitor to all things dwarven and clapped in chains. Or hammered. Sleep time. Reminder for morning: get more apples for eating as well as drinking.

### 26 Felsite

Last entry is now three days old. Came across a human town today, and got directions to the next one. I don't know how long it'll take to find Spearbreakers, but I hope it's soon. Spent the night in the inn, got properly drunk. I'm considering changing my mind about the elves, just cause my mind feels clearer now than it was then, but I decided against it. Can't let Tradition and The Dwarven Way get in the way of survival. I traded my cider for this room, so I'm out of booze for now. I'll have to drink plenty tomorrow, and get some fruits. Shadow says I shouldn't break the streak after this, so I'll be going back to quarter rations.

Question for further consideration: Why is it when I'M drunk, I'm clear headed, but when HUMANS get drunk, it's like watching a bunch of sober dwarves trying to do pretty much anything? Perhaps whatever alcohol gives Dwarves is produced naturally by humans? Further research needed. Now how to perform it? Though, it could be my possible half dwarven-ness. I wish I could figure out if this is accurate or not. It's starting to bother me. Mom sometimes said when she was drunker than usual that I was a gift from Armok. Never could figure out what that was supposed to mean... Am I adopted?

### 3 Hematite

Next human town, took me five days to get here. Saw a trader's caravan, and asked them about Spearbreakers. They told me it was a horrible place where blood rained from the sky and the undead and spawn held daily "fuck you, no, fuck you" contests. They also gave me directions, though they tried to keep me from going. Eh, screw em. Haven't heard anything about zombies, and as for the sky raining blood? We worship a god who revels in blood. Why wouldn't we celebrate when he causes the skies themselves to spill the substance? Anyways, Spearbreakers is a ways away. The traders gave me some booze and fruits, so I'm set for now on that front.

Question for further consideration: How the frig does Armok pull off blood rain? Just forming it spontaneously is too simple for him. Is he running a bunch of animals/people through a meat grinder, and dumping the blood that way? Is there a way to build to his domain and ask him directly? Or will this have to wait for that inevitable death? I wonder if I'm raving...

### 7 Hematite

Gross, just fucking gross, man. It's been four days since I left the last town. I just found a dead body, its split down the middle, looks like a half rotted dwarf. No clothes, though, and the arms don't end in hands, they end in scything claws. From what I've heard, I believe this is a spawn. I caved in the body's head and popped the eyes out, just to make sure it was /dead/ dead. I'm not gonna sleep tonight, this thing is way too creepy. I keep expecting it to get up. I must be crazy, going someplace where there are MORE of these, for the express purpose of fighting them.

It's the next morning, and the corpse hasn't moved. There is a dead rat with a bit of skin in its mouth, so they seem to be poisonous. Those claws look wicked sharp. I kicked to rat over to one arm, and slid a claw along the rat, and it split the skin

easily, with little effort on my part.

Question for further consideration: could these claws be made into weapons? if so, what kind? Perhaps a scythe, it would be appropriate. Gonna move on, this body still gives me the creeps.

14 Hematite

Nothing much happening right now. I'm in a forest. It's been a week. I smell burned meat. No idea where it's coming from, as there's no smoke. Gonna see about climbing a tree and sleeping in it (even if that is an elfish thing to do), I don't trust this forest.

15 Hematite

I was right not to trust the forest. Somehow, my little still has gone missing. I still have my alcohol, which leads me to believe it was a Kobold. I'm irritated, but I don't bother Kobolds. They don't have very much in life, and I pity them their existence, which is so poor they have to be like carrion birds, stealing what little they can to survive. If my little still will help them, I guess they can have it. Though, I would hunt them down had they taken my food, or booze. Good thing I've been rationing myself. Gotta get walking, I got a time limit now.

17 Hematite

Stroke of luck! I've found a caravan of dwarves headed to Spearbreakers after about two days of wandering. If we are lucky enough to get there without being killed, I'll have found a new home! I hope when I get put on war duty, I'm not killed immediately. It's a risk I gotta take. Maybe I'll just mention my mechanical tinkering instead, and build up to telling them about my hammer experience.

20 Hematite

Well, I was lucky, at any rate. We ran into a pile of gobbies, and now I'm the only one left. Shame, really. There was a master weaponsmith in that caravan. Dead now. Seems he forgot to bring any of them masterwork weapons. Well, Spearbreakers, here I come, all by my lonesome. Enjoy.

22 Hematite

I FUCKING MADE IT. Time to tear some goblins a new one! Especially the snatchers that I keep hearing. Friggin' kidnappers. Of course, if they are productive enough, they'll end up outnumbering themselves, and there will be a gobbo civil war, and we can just sit back and laugh.

## SOULSLICERJAMES:

"My lord," said a dwarf dressed in robes, kneeling before a large throne of gold and elf-bone, "you must see that great danger is surely on the way. The recent surge in spawn activity is only the beginning. None of the forces we sent to counterattack the barbarian kingdoms have as much as sent word back."

"Yes, yes," replied the king, stroking his beard threaded with strands of adamantite, "I understand. For this you shall be rewarded with a position of importance in one of our settlements. Now please leave while I discuss which one you shall be sent to with my court."

"Thank you, my lord"

After the robed dwarf left, the king turned to his most trusted advisor. "Clearly it is agreed that this madness must be stopped, lest the public is driven to panic from these lies. Is there some place we can send him and be certain never to hear of him again?"

"Well," replied the advisor, "there is this one outpost called Spearbreakers"...

[[Talvieno's note: Mr Frog's story updates are so far removed from the rest of the canon (by his own desire) that it's incredibly easy to fit them in to the timeline, and I, resident chronologist, am thankful for this.]]

## MR FROG:

Mr Frog was in his bedroom preparing to change into his sleeping garments when a screen on the wall opposite him lit up, displaying Joseph's familiar, eerily-perfect face. Mr Frog gazed at him apprehensively; he didn't particularly care what anyone saw him doing -- he kept his illicit activities well-hidden, and wasn't the sort of man that would attract voyeurs in any number -- but Joseph's intrusion demonstrated very clearly that there was no hiding from him here.

"Good evening, Mr Frog," said Joseph balmily; "I trust I'm not interrupting anything?" He winked conspiratorially at Mr Frog and added: "No plans with a certain blue-skinned belle?"

Mr Frog scowled, annoyed at the insinuation. "Not in the foreseeable future, no," he growled; "I didn't join Eris for its romantic opportunities." He had to admit that Silena was incredibly-attractive in her own ditzzy, quasi-humanoid way, but simply interacting with her felt like a smiling piece of sandpaper was being rubbed directly across his spine. The last thing he wanted was to [touch] the idiot.

Joseph shook his head disapprovingly. "Now, now, old boy," he said smoothly, "I'm just having some fun. There's no need to get so ruffled." He straightened up, drilling his unpleasantly-pleasant gaze into Mr Frog's eyes like two unflinchingly-friendly laser cutters. "Anyways, to the point..." he said breezily, "I was watching the security feeds from your workspace -- interested in your progress, you see -- when I saw --" Joseph furrowed his brow slightly "-- pretty little Silena break down in tears after being led to watch one of the dwarven test subjects turn." He leaned forward and steepled his fingers and continued, his voice dripping with concern: "Now, what would possess you to show such a delicate young flower such a terrifying sight?"

Mr Frog paused, his mind racing. Showing Silena the Spawn may not have been terribly-suspicious in and of itself, but to a psychopath like Joseph, it could very well be all the evidence anyone ever needed.

"She's been breathing down my neck and getting underfoot ever since I came here," he said evenly, thinking quickly; "Watching her break down was very cathartic." It wasn't a lie [per se].

Joseph frowned, his eyes suddenly serious. "In that case, I'm gravely-disappointed in you, Mr Frog," he said; "I value your genius, but I won't tolerate you victimizing my staff. Your petty malice is their suffering." He shook his head, tut-tutting softly; "I can't say this is surprising, however. Though you've severed your ties, you're clearly still a Ballpoint man through and through."

Mr Frog felt a brief flare of anger at the comparison, though he didn't particularly care what this lunatic thought of him. "I hate that blasted company and everything it stands for," he said flatly.

Joseph nodded. "I know you do," he said, "and that's why I accepted your aid." He

shrugged and continued: "I won't hold your cruel heart against you. It's your work that I value, and sadly, not everyone is as enlightened as I." There wasn't a trace of irony in that last sentence the Mr Frog could detect. Mr Frog toyed with the idea of pointing out Joseph's incorrect pronoun choice, but decided against it -- the blowhard probably wouldn't even pay attention. Mr Frog remembered Draigneau and his nigh-on-impenetrable narcissism; he'd wanted to strangle the man back in the day, but Joseph was worse by a factor of ten.

Joseph bowed his head. "Good night, Mr Frog," he said cordially, before terminating the call.

Mr Frog chewed on his tongue, slightly-nervous; he took a swig from his flask. How much did Joseph suspect? Did he even suspect anything? Silena's cheeriness was like a puffy white cloud passively obscuring the sun, but Joseph's was like an impenetrable mask. He couldn't read the man at all.

Spearbreakers had been a festering backwater filled with smelly, stupid dwarves and without the slightest trace of advanced technology, but here at Eris Mr Frog had to weather a relentless game of cloak and dagger; eyes were everywhere, and there was no way of telling what they thought about what they were seeing. He'd never felt so uncomfortable in a research facility.

Mr Frog finally decided that there wasn't any point ruminating over it and went to bed. He'd just have to be careful, that's all.

Silena stood rooted to the ground, staring in horror at the shrieking Spawn standing where her father had been. She wanted to run away, to find a way to help him, but she was paralyzed. She watched helplessly as the monster pounced towards her with its claws outstretched, after which it slapped her sharply in the face. "Wake up," it barked in a familiar deep voice.

Silena tried to raise her arms to block the creature's assault, but she couldn't move. Something seemed odd about the situation; however, she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

The Spawn adjusted its glasses, then grabbed Silena's arm roughly and pulled it in, seeming to examine it; afterwards, it slapped Silena again and brought its grotesque head closer to her face. "Wake up," it repeated roughly, louder this time; "You seem to still have a pulse. I'd suggest that you use it."

Silena's eyes opened with difficulty; Mr Frog's bearded, bespectacled face was in front of her, looking highly-unimpressed. Silena flinched; it wasn't a very pleasant image to wake up to. She was lying on the couch in their quarters. She unsteadily brought herself up to an upright position; her entire body felt as though Frog had strapped heavy objects to it, perhaps as some bizarre experiment.

"Did I fall asleep..?" mumbled Silena; Mr Frog nodded curtly. Silena suddenly went bolt upright, her eyes wide. She'd only sat down for a moment. "I'm so sorry!" she wailed in a panic; "I'll get up and help you right away! Please don't get mad at me!" Silena had slept extremely-poorly the previous night, her sleep having been relentlessly interrupted by terrifying nightmares about the Spawn.

Mr Frog raised an eyebrow. "I'm not angry with you," he said bluntly; "I've only just had breakfast myself, and besides that, I never actually needed your help in the first place." Silena chewed on this; she supposed that she was happy that Mr Frog wasn't angry, though he didn't have to be quite so rude.

Satisfied for the moment that his roommate was conscious, Mr Frog turned and walked towards the exit. Silena forced herself to her feet and staggered after him; the diminutive man turned around and looked up at her, raising an eyebrow.

"I-I'll be right with you," stammered Silena, she wobbled as she tried to walk, her legs not cooperating.



Mr Frog furrowed his brow for a moment, thinking. "Actually," he said, his voice suddenly-halfway-pleasant, "Why don't you take the day off?"

Silena's mouth dropped open in disbelief. "Really?" she said, her eyes wide.

Mr Frog shrugged dismissively. "You're enough of a bother when you're fully-rested," he said casually; "I can't imagine the sort of unspeakable gremlin you'd be in your current state."

Silena beamed, a brief shadow of suspicion overtaken by pure joy; she'd gotten used to his barbed comments -- they weren't really worth retaliating over -- and she was genuinely-grateful that he was letting her have the day to rest. "Thank you," she said; she stumbled over to Mr Frog and hugged him tightly, ignoring his protests, lifting the little man off the ground as she did so.

Mr Frog wriggled free from Silena's grasp and dropped to the floor; he glared at her and began walking back towards the exit. "Just try to get some sleep," he said bluntly as he opened the door and left.

Silena walked back to her bedroom; as she did so, however, a familiar nagging doubt entered into the back of her mind. So many things about Mr Frog just didn't add up nicely. Just yesterday, he had shown her the most horrifying sight imaginable seemingly just to watch her suffer, yet was now suddenly magnanimous enough to give her a day off no strings attached. He usually ignored her... except for when he was bombarding her with oddly-specific questions regarding Eris's operations. He claimed to be allied with Joseph, yet demonstrated nothing but cold contempt for the man. Perhaps he was merely an eccentric genius, but Silena's father had been one as well, and there had always been some logical motive behind his errant behaviour. Mr Frog was acting like this for a reason, she was sure of it.

Silena tried to puzzle it out for a few minutes, but her sleepy brain refused to put the pieces together. She'd think about it some more after she'd slept, she decided.

Meanwhile, Mr Frog continued down the hallway, feeling almost giddy. Not only had he earned Silena's gratitude -- a potentially-useful resource at the moment -- but he now had an entire Silena-free day stretching out in front of him. Perhaps he'd have a halfway-pleasant day for once.

#### **(SPLINT):**

Ballpoint: Near monopoly on larger aircraft and combat aircraft. Moderate number of hypercompetant Security Contractors. Advanced weaponry based off magnetic accelerator technology.

Parasol: Large numbers of "unaffiliated" PMC forces, masking their involvement in most matters. Does possess heavy armor to make up for their lack of airpower. Has advanced weaponry (LASER and Mag-Cel)

Eris: Large numbers of fanatically loyal infantry forces and large numbers of medium armor(IFVs/APCs) equipped to fight both heavy armor and airpower. Like Parasol and Ballpoint, they posses magnetic accelerator weapons.

Stone INC: Limited numbers of their own Contractors. Deploying forces to the city to protect company investments. Again, posses advanced weapon systems, though theirs is of their own make.

Sewaturet: Global Coalition capitol. Controls the largest highways in their part of the world, requiring ground-restricted forces to take the city to do anything else. Compared to most corporate forces, their equipment is outdated, but they have large numbers of Self-Propelled artillery units and numerous small attack aircraft/dropships. Uses outdated propellant driven projectile weapons, except on their heavy armor units.

These factors will lead to a class 5 clusterfuck.

[[Talvieno's note: This prompted a large conversation on how exactly this is all correct. Mr Frog pointed out that Eris works through manipulation only, and doesn't have an army.]]

### **(TALVIENO):**

Parasol's core focus is its departments of Research & Development. Their goal is to research and develop !!SCIENCE!! so that Parasol as a whole can uncover the greatest secrets of the interuniverse. Their secondary, much lesser focus is their mobile infantry, which they use to comb through alternate dimensions to uncover new areas of !!SCIENCE!!, and protect experiments already in progress. Though their weapons technology is behind that of Ballpoint's, due to Ballpoint's scavenging ways, they make up for it in combat by employing their seemingly non-destructive inventions in a clever, strategic manner that not only levels the playing field, but gives them an edge. When Parasol finds something marketable, they choose the proper universe/timeline/time/location and sell it, trading solely in interuniversally rare metals. Through this they earn their income and expand.

Ballpoint Tech is a mercenary-style organization. Most members are called "contractors" and are given standard-issue gear at the time of their employment, though they may use whatever weapons/armor they desire. They are allowed to hire themselves out for their own profit while off-duty if they so wish, so long as it doesn't detract from the well-being of Ballpoint as a whole. While on-duty, the contractors are under the command of higher-ranking employees, and form a relatively large army. The organization uses divisions of this army to better itself and its equipment through blitzkrieg-style raids, looting technology and valuables as they go. On occasion they market their weaponry to neutrals and allies through the interdimensional black market, though they trade honorably take care not to make more enemies than necessary. Through this they earn their income and expand.

Quote from Mr Frog: "Eris is an underground entity that operates covertly."  
As far as I see it, this sums Eris up perfectly, but I'd add that they accomplish their means through manipulation. Kind of like ninjas that like getting into your head and using you as a puppet to take down your own allies, and get you killed in the process - all without being noticed. In my opinion, that's freaky scary to have to go up against. I'd rather see my foe.

### **DRACONIK\_SANKIS:**

## **More Prologue**

As Draconik made his way through the main courtyard of Lab Six his friends, coworkers and general others in the company who knew him gathered to bid him farewell, good luck and the other thousand and one ways of bidding someone goodbye as they went to perform a task that company standard laid solely at his feet. His assistant, now replacement of head of Bio-Weapons division awaited him at the Gateway, the massive time-space rift that provided Parasol with undeniable access to worlds such as the spawn invested hole he was about to embark to. She was the bearer of bad news and everyone else's gifts, Draco the director just got news from our agents it seems that the business that has kept Mr Frog's attention seems to be a third party more details when you arrive but I've gathered extra supplies for you, don't ask and good luck. She said as she handed him the extra baggage of gifts and equipment. He thanked her and strolled through the gateway.

On the other side was the meadow where he would meet the migrant wave that would take him to Spearbreakers, Draconik used this time to repack and take stock of what he had.

## **Draco's Belongings**

One Personal Mobile Workstation [laptop], One Micro-BATTERY [Water Based Power Supply], Standard Parasol Research Equipment  
Three full Chemistry Sets, 2 sets Surgical Gear, one modified Parasol plasma torch, Crystal Decanter w/ Bio-Mass Anti-Growth agent, Personal Data Assistant and his Digital Artificial Life-form (DAL) assistant who had been with him for Twenty of his Forty years in Parasol, as well as many schematics for more advanced Research equipment.

## **(ASEAHERU):**

Stone INC is an oxymoron. It is a large company that tries to be nice, has advanced technology that makes NASA look like a bunch of cavemen, can fly by manipulating gravity and have very limited material. They are fort builders and defenders. Most of there guff is in turrets or has almost no ammo. So attacking is a piece of shit and defending is ok-ish. Also, SPACE. They developed there own portal that that requires SPACE. so, if they do attack, expect blocks of ships flying from SPACE, landing troops with insanely powerful weapons(i.e. micro missiles aimed at obsidian hearts.) but they are relativity nice. Just don't piss them off.

[[Talvieno's note: The following story chapters (Hanslanda's and my own) are moved here from far ahead in the thread.]]

## **TALVIENO:**

### **Vanya's Journals, Entry 18**

*Vanya's flowing script continues on the following pages, but your mind is preoccupied with something else: what language did the soldiers of Ballpoint speak? Vanya, by her own admission, was bilingual - she knew dwarven and elvish. In the previous journal she'd proved it, writing in two different languages. You put the book down for*

*a moment, musing. Vanya had been able to converse with the Ballpoint soldiers she'd mentioned in the previous entry, so despite largely being human, they either spoke dwarven or elvish. After further thought, you decide that it must have been dwarven: after all, why would Mr Frog bother sending Urist and Hans there if they couldn't speak the language? Satisfied with your conclusion, you pick the journal back up and begin to read.*

Usually, everything feels better when you're not doing it alone. It's always nice to have a friend by your side, or be able to show someone what you've accomplished. Or even just to have someone with you as you die. Loneliness is a depressing feeling to have, but if you feel supported by your friends, you feel as though you can accomplish everything. This goes for all sentient races, and not just dwarves: elves, humans, and mountain barbarians feel that way too. Even goblins would rather not be alone, as they enjoy bragging and showing off their war trophies. In a way, we're all the same: we're social creatures. We need each other to be happy.

...Except for the Spawn of Holistic. Unlike the rest of us, they don't really care if anyone of their race knows of their triumphs... All they want to do is kill. It doesn't matter if their killing makes a difference; it doesn't matter if the people they're killing were going to die anyway. Maybe it's not really a want, and it's a *need* - maybe they *need* to kill: they don't seem to have a choice, anyway. The moment they turn from sentience to the wretched monsters that they are, they become pure evil - with no exceptions. There's just no such thing as a "good" Spawn.

But then there's another race that's born evil: the goblins. From the moment they set foot in this world, opening their little eyes for the first time, they're evil. Somehow, it doesn't seem fair... They don't really have a choice in it. Like the Spawn, it's almost like they're *forced* to be evil. For the rest of us, we start out neutral and choose our path, but goblins...

And what if a goblin saw how much harm he was causing and didn't like it? What if he wanted to stop hurting and start helping others instead? He'd be put to death for heresy by his own society, all because he wanted to make his own decisions. It's unfair, in the end... and in a way, I can't help but feel sorry for them. All the same... at least they enjoy the company of those they're with.

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It was early morning, and I was getting dressed in my hated Ballpoint spy suit. I was sleepy, and my eyes were still a little blurry. I'm not much of a morning person, and I'd much rather sleep in, but Mr Frog had woken me up, saying I needed to be ready "early" today. In my opinion, six o' clock is *already* too early. Five is ridiculous. I'd spent the evening before teaching Urist and Hans about technology and Ballpoint, and they'd listened to every word I said. It was funny, watching the looks of disbelief and uncertainty on their faces. Urist in particular looks cute when he's confused; sometimes I just wanted to laugh tackle him with a hug.

But they were coming! Urist, Hans and I were going on a mission together, and I was *so* excited. I almost dropped my hairbrush a couple times as I stood at the mirror, brushing it carefully. I'd seen how Urist was looking at me the night before - he liked me. I was almost *sure* of it. Now I was fantasizing about how I could let him know that I felt the same way.

I was actually looking at my hair without feeling regret at what Mr Frog had done to it.

I'd been ecstatic lately.

A buzzer sounded, echoing through my little bedroom. The walls are soundproof - the only way that Mr Frog could let me know he wanted me was either to open the door (and risk my being less than decent), or sound the buzzer. Usually he didn't care either way, but somehow I felt that my friends had arrived. With a few extra brushes to my hair, trying to arrange it as best I could for Urist's sake, I left the mirror and walked towards the door.

I paused at my beanie as I passed it, wondering whether I should put it on... I couldn't wear it at Ballpoint, but I didn't want to remind Urist that I was an elf, either... I was ashamed of my ears, anyway.

The buzzer sounded again, interrupting my thoughts. "Fine!" I yelled pointlessly, pushing the button beside the door. The wall slid away, revealing the faces of three dwarves: Mr Frog, Hans... and Urist.

Urist and Hans had a couple of Mr Frog's special weapons slung over their backs: Urist had a sawpike, and Hans had a "buzzhammer", which is like a warhammer, except it has a buzzsaw blade at one of the flat ends. The extent of their disguise was how they were both wearing dark gray clothes: Ballpoint's color. *They* didn't have to wear a tight, skinny outfit.

But that last detail was lost on me as I smiled at them happily, lost in my fantasies, unsure of what to do.

Mr Frog quickly answered that question for me. "Get over here, stupid girl," he ordered brusquely, walking over to the hallway door. "I've got an errand to run; I'll be back in a moment. Take the opportunity to say hello, or whatever it is you socialites do." With that, he was gone.

I walked towards the middle of the room, stopping short before the little table-lined walkway where Urist. "Hi!" I said with a smile, my eyes lingering on Urist. His eyes met mine, and I looked away, embarrassed.

"You didn't cover your ears this time..." he said thoughtfully.

I blushed and wished I could turn invisible. "I'm sorry," I began apologetically, "I'd cover them if I could, but -"

Urist interrupted, trying to ease my thoughts. "It's all right, Vanya. I don't mind." He hesitated for a moment, and ventured, "You look nice."

Basking in the compliment, I looked at him, meeting his gaze. "Really?" I tried to smile as prettily as I could, hoping for more.

Urist opened his mouth as if to speak, but before he could manage, Mr Frog burst back into the room. "That's taken care of!" he said, seemingly annoyed as he closed the door and stalked towards the portal machine. "Do you remember your mission objectives?"

I followed him with my eyes and nodded, as he began to set the console for our journey. Mr Frog had rehearsed our objectives with me the night before. First, we were supposed to find an access card of a high enough level to allow us into the warehouses. After that, we were supposed to get Mr Frog's PEA and return. It all seemed very simple at the time...

The portal hummed, and with a wish, the air within it coalesced again into a shimmering, rippling surface. The looks of surprise and wonderment on Hans' face almost made me laugh, but I kept quiet so as not to embarrass him. I think Urist saw me smiling, though.

Mr Frog, however, didn't feel anything close to mirth as he saw Hans begin backing away. "No, you don't!" he said with a scowl, rushing over behind the giant of a dwarf

and pushing him forwards with ease. "You have to get in there. Vanya, you go first! Lead them through so this buffoon doesn't get terrified and run out on us!" For a moment, I paused, struck by how similar in height Mr Frog was to Hans. "Move!" Mr Frog ordered. I felt my feet rushing me forwards towards the portal in response. Moments later, I felt my consciousness twisting as I traveled through nothingness.

I "came to" in a dimly-lit, metal-clad room, illuminated only by one of Ballpoint's trademark trapezoidal corridors, visible through an open doorway. Except for the portal behind me, everything seemed quiet, and I stepped back and turned around to look at it in curiosity. I'd never seen someone exit a portal before, and I wondered how it would look.

Urist appeared, first his leg and then the rest of him, as he stepped through at a brisk pace, gritting his teeth as if he felt he'd be ripped apart, or worse. My expression changed from curiosity to surprise as he ran into me, tripping and knocking us both to the icy metal of the floor.

For a second I lay there, wondering what had happened, and why I felt a heavy weight pressing down on me. Against the cold floor, wearing Ballpoint's thin spy suit, I felt naked again. As my eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, I began to make out the strong outline of Urist's lantern jaw, his face hovering inches above mine. Then it began to dawn on me - Urist was lying on top of me.

"Ah! Get off!" I yelled in a panic, trying to get out from under him. My face burned in embarrassment. I liked him, yes, but we were sort of in an intimate position... *too* intimate for my tastes, really.

He struggled to his feet in a hurry, trying not to step on me or trip over me again. I scooted backwards across the floor and got up.

For a minute or so, we stood there awkwardly, trying to say something or explain, but not finding the right words. It was very... uncomfortable.

"I didn't mean to fall on you," he finally said. He looked abashed by what he'd done, and I couldn't help but want to assure him that it wasn't really that big of a deal.

"It's all right," I answered, almost whispering, getting to my feet. "It wasn't intentional. You didn't see me there, and I was in the way. It's my fault, really."

"No, the fault is mine," he replied. "I should have been watching."

I took a few steps closer, looking up into his eyes. "It's okay, really."

For a moment, we stood there, looking at each other. Right then, I felt *sure* he cared about me; for a moment, I felt sure we were just about to kiss. My heart fluttered as if it'd grown wings, like I'd flown away to a dream world, and I tilted my lips up closer to him, almost begging for him to make a move.

Without warning, there was a noise from behind him - heavy stomping boots and a loud "- but Mr Frog, I don't *wanna* go in -" that cut off abruptly as Hans plowed into both of us, knocking us down with me, once again, underneath.

After we'd untangled ourselves and had apologized a second time (I couldn't help but glare at Hans for ruining our romantic moment), we assessed our situation. Mr Frog had already closed the portal from his side, and there was no going back through. "So... You've any idea where we are, missus?" Hans asked me, looking around the room.

I shook my head, though I knew the gesture was barely visible. "There should be maps on the floors of the intersections - I saw them last time I was here. Once we get there, we can figure out where we are."

Urist spoke. "Did Mr Frog inform you of where to find the access key?"

"No..." I replied slowly, remembering. "He just said that only people who have them

are higher-ranking officers."

"Well," rumbled Hans, "let's go find one, then."

We left the little room, and I led my friends through the hallways at a good pace.

Once, I glanced backwards to see where they were, and to my relief they'd kept up.

"We are still here," Urist said. "No need to check."

I nodded absentmindedly. "There's an intersection in front of us, see?" I pointed ahead at where another hallway crossed ours. "On the floor in the middle there's a map; it should be marked with different places, and we'll be able to figure out where we are."

"Oh, one of them 'you are here' maps, ya mean!" Hans said knowingly with a smile.

"Spearbreakers don't have any of them."

I started to laugh, but abruptly stopped: a dwarf-sized figure, clad in the heaviest armor I'd seen at Ballpoint, turned off the side hallway up ahead and started towards us.

Consciously trying to look natural, I slowed my step a bit. "Just keep walking, don't look at him," I whispered to my companions, trying my best to act brave. I actually think I did a good job. "And don't attack; that gun he's carrying is huge. If it's a guard, he should just walk on by..."

Unfortunately, that wasn't what happened at all. "Halt, state your business," ordered a woman's voice, as the helmet's visor lifted to reveal the face of a battle-scarred female. "I'll need to see your ID." She stopped a few meters in front of us, waiting expectantly.

I got it out quickly, trying not to offer any resistance. I especially didn't want Hans or Urist to go battle-crazy. I wasn't sure if they would: we hadn't really gotten to that...

"Vanya Carena," I said, holding out my little card. "I'm a -"

"Level 3 spy," she interrupted with a glare. "Yes, don't look surprised, I know the uniforms' color code. You're supposed to be down at the southeast quadrant. Why are you over here?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but Urist spoke as he stepped past me, arms folded.

"Who wants to know?"

The dwarven woman pulled herself up to her full height - several inches taller than me. "I'm Commander Acetalyta, it's my business to know," she said as she stared down at us.

Urist looked over his shoulder at me with a smile. "Convenient," he murmured, and then turned again to face the commander.

"Where's your identification?" she asked. "Don't you have it with you?"

I didn't like Urist taking control - *I* was supposed to be in charge. "They're with me," I spoke up. At the same time, I was beginning to worry that our mission had already failed: The commander looked at us suspiciously as a result of my comment.

Urist spoke again, calm and collected as ever as he stepped slowly closer to her.

"We're on an assignment," he said. His voice was like chocolate. "But... if you would like..." he continued, almost seductively, "I could come back after it's done."

I opened my mouth to protest, but couldn't produce a sound. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He was *flirting* with her!

"Well..." she said slowly, her expression softening as a smile stole over it, "I think that might be against protocol..." She looked back at Hans for a moment. "I think I might have to take you two down to security."

"Mmmm, sounds like she caught us," rumbled a voice I would've ordinarily found sexy, and I turned towards Hans in disbelieving surprise as he stepped past me to stand with Urist. "Guess you'll have t' take us in." They seemed to be in on whatever was happening, and "security" was obviously a poorly disguised metaphor.

"Let's go, boys." Commander Acetalyta began walking down the hallway at a slower pace, swinging her hips with Hans and Urist close beside her. "You two are in biiiigggggg trouble," she crooned, and I almost vomited.

"You can't go yet!" I protested, trying to keep my voice level. I wanted to yell at them for so many things, not the least of which was the fact that they were abandoning me.

And then, Urist turned around and tossed a little card at me. "Don't wait up for us, Vanya," he said, *winking* as they turned the corner. He actually seemed to enjoy it.

I was left alone in the hallway, standing silent, dimly aware of the passage of time. Finally, I shook my head in disbelief and bent down to the floor to pick up the little card Urist had tossed. I felt my heart soften slightly as I read the label: "Level 8 Security Key, Property of Commander Acetalyta." I had a way into the warehouse district... but at what cost?

Dejectedly, I walked forwards to the intersection, reading the map on the floor. A bright blue "you are here" marked where I stood, and it wasn't difficult to tell the way to the warehouses. With an effort I started in that direction, but as I walked my mind began to wander, and I remembered what Urist had said only minutes before. He hadn't specifically flirted with her, but his seductive voice still lingered in my ears: "*If you would like... I could come back after it's done.*" Even then, I could imagine him in a dark room with Acetalyta, his lips on her, her hands moving over his chest. It was horrid, and my vision blurred as a tear formed and fell down my cheek.

That surprised me. I'd known Urist for over a year, and he'd often been on my thoughts... But did I *love* him? Would I be happy for him if he'd found someone he liked? Part of me desperately wanted him for my own, and for that filthy skank to keep her grubby little hands off him... but at the same time, I wanted him to be happy.

I shook my head angrily to clear my mind, roughly brushing away my tears. It's impossible to love someone right after you meet them! It wasn't love he felt for her; it was lust!!!

Walking onwards through the corridors, I quickened my step as if I could escape my thoughts; I couldn't let it get to me. Urist and I were friends, and nothing else. I couldn't possibly love him, could I? We'd only spent 12 hours together, at the best. I also had to admit to myself that I'd never really been "in love" before. My whole life, I'd always avoided people... all out of fear of finding out who I was. Urist had been the first one who'd been different. He hadn't cared what I was.

But now he was off somewhere with that woman, that *Ballpoint Commander*. In my mind, I could see him making out with her, her giggling at his low voice, clothes lying on the floor... I could almost hear her detestable voice moaning in wicked pleasure. It was the worst type of torture imaginable: the torture of the heart. It was slowly, cruelly murdering me inside, and I desperately wanted it out of my head.

Fortunately, it wasn't long before something happened to draw my attention. Turning the corridor's corner in front of me were forty or more armed guards, marching in long lines, four abreast. Not knowing what else to do, I got to the side of the hallway and waited for them to pass, hoping I wouldn't be questioned.

They marched past me without giving me so much as a glance, acting very professional and orderly, much unlike the off duty mercenaries I'd met in the barracks. In a way, I admired their level of control - dwarves could never hold such perfect formations for more than a few seconds... even when standing still. But at

the same time... every soldier there reminded me of *my* soldier, Urist. It was tugging at my heart; every one of them a cruel slap to my cheek, my thoughts an icy prison from which I couldn't escape.

Finally, they passed by me without incident, and I continued towards the warehouses. I was almost there, and I had the key in hand... but I'd paid dearly for it.



TALVIENO:

Vanya's Journal

Ballpoint Mission, Part II

This is an emu leather-bound journal. You're pretty sure there's nothing more to be said about it at this point, but the next entry menaces with the dried imprints of fallen tears.

Jealousy forces disquieting images into our minds. In reality, what we imagine might not even be true, but people in love tend to think illogically. If it gets bad enough, you find yourself mistrusting even your best friends... I'd never had it happen to me before, and I was flailing about, trying to find solid ground to stand on. It was as if I'd been cast into deep water; as if thrown over the side of a dwarven cargo barge, only to realize I couldn't swim. I was drowning in my own mind, and there wasn't any air to be had. But I didn't want to see it as "jealousy" at all.

I tried to convince myself everything was all right, but my thoughts were flowing too swiftly through my mind. *Urist was only trying to get the key for me*, I told myself. I wanted to believe it. With all I had, I really did. The idea lifted my spirits briefly, only to be crushed by recurring memories in my mind: Urist's seductive voice; how smooth he'd been; how much he'd seemed to enjoy it. It couldn't possibly have been the first time he'd picked someone up like that, I was sure of it. I hated the thought, and it made me feel wretched, but I didn't know what else to think.

I wanted to hit something, or kick something. I wanted to go back and yell at him for following his own desires instead of staying with me and completing the mission. At the same time, I was faintly aware that his abandoning me wasn't the real reason I was upset: I *liked* him, as *more* than a friend. I'd never really thought about it until then; I'd always brushed it out of my mind because of what it meant. Handsome or not, gentlemanly or not, he was a *dwarf*. I was a horrible, no-good elf. If I was to be judged by the actions of my own kind - eating the dead, being religiously hypocritical - I almost *deserved* to be killed. More importantly... how could an elf have children with a dwarf?

I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself. It was only a flirt; *only a flirt*. That was *all* it had been, and now I was overthinking everything.

Up ahead of me the hallway opened into a large room: the entrances to the warehouse. I knew I needed to put all of it out of my mind for the moment and finish my job, or else someone would probably notice. I'd been lucky enough to avoid the guards so far... but what could I do against even one?

A guard was pacing back and forth, patrolling the wide row of double doors. After hiding for a moment, I calmed myself as best I could and walked towards the nearest door. In the keypad to the right of it, there was a little slot where you could fit a card. Not sure what else to do, I inserted Commander Acetalyta's into it, and to my immense relief I heard a little "ding", and the doors slid open.

I glanced back at the guard, who was walking forwards at a slow, steady pace, gun in hand. He didn't appear suspicious, and I felt glad of it: so far, everything was going smoothly. Taking the card back and slipping it into my sleeve, I entered the warehouse.

I froze just inside the entrance, gaping in fearful awe at the tall towers of metal shelving. They seemed to rise at least four stories from the floor, and went back deeper than the garage, or even the barracks. Between them, the occasional armed guard silently strolled, striding slowly through as if ghosts from another realm. I paid little notice to them, more occupied with the question of how I was going to find Mr Frog's PEA with row upon row of shelves to search.

The sound of a metal door sliding shut behind me snapped me out of my thoughts, and I began to walk forwards with a hesitant step into the massive chamber. To my right, there was a stack of backpacks, with a sign that read, "Return after use". I knew I wouldn't be able to return it, but I figured a backpack would probably come in handy, so I took one. Slinging it over my shoulder, I walked down an aisle between the two nearest shelves, looking in wonderment at all the different devices stacked upon them: things I knew I'd never be able to identify, much less comprehend. Suddenly I jumped, looking upwards as I heard the loud noise of whirring electric motors. Thirty feet above me, some sort of massive mechanical machine was climbing between the shelves like a spider. Its eight legs were clinging to opposite sides of the aisle, and I instinctively ducked as it passed overhead. The rider in the pod looked down at me and nodded in acknowledgement as his vehicle turned the corner out of sight, maneuvering its legs in an otherworldly manner.

I felt overloaded by the new sounds and sights, and all I could think was that I wanted to go home. "Culture shock", Mr Frog would later call it. Honestly, even had I known the name, I wouldn't have cared. I felt a little dizzy and sick to my stomach, but I tried my best to ignore it.

"Are you all right?"

A blonde-haired human guard, looking about my age, walked towards me with a concerned expression on his face. I hadn't even known he was there. "Yes... I'm all right, just -" I began, and paused: it shouldn't have been so obvious. I examined his face suspiciously. "Why?"

The man looked at me with a curious expression. "You just look... lost, somehow," he said, looking at me thoughtfully. "Plus, I'm pretty good at telling when somebody's off their game." There seemed to be a hint of loneliness about him.

"Off their game?" I wanted him to go away, but at the same time, there was something inviting about him... almost attractive.

He laughed. "Yeah, you look like you're hiding from a ghost."

I smiled and shook my head, glancing downwards. "No... not really a ghost... just problems." He seemed to see right through me.

"Problems? Wanna talk about it?" He was definitely the chattiest guard I'd ever heard of, but right then, I was thankful for it. It had taken my mind off my troubles. I hesitated. "I can't..." I replied, trying to sound regretful. "I'm busy."

With a knowing nod, he smiled disarmingly. "No problem, just figured I'd offer. If you wanna discuss it over lunch, I get off in an hour..." he hinted, raising an eyebrow hopefully.

"No, I..." I frowned and stopped for a moment, looking at his deep blue eyes, his close-cropped hair. Without meaning to, I remembered Urist's betrayal - how he'd run off with the commander without so much as a goodbye. Now a guard was practically asking me out. In a sort of vengeful way, it felt good, and I felt myself open up to him a little. "You know what..." I said slowly, letting a smile creep across my features, "yes. Yes, why not?" Looking back now, I realize I'd completely forgotten where I was, though I hadn't forgotten what I was doing. "But could you help me with this first?"

He appeared happy that I'd agreed, and it made me feel guilty. "Sure! Whatcha need? And what's your name, by the way? Mine's Halion."

"I'm trying to find something, but I don't know where to look. And my name is... Vanya..." As my name formed on my lips, I remembered my accursed elven heritage. Then I realized something surprising. He wasn't an elf, he could see *I* was an elf, and it mattered so little to him that he'd actually asked me to lunch. In my opinion, he'd one-upped Urist. I felt a tinge of anger as his name crossed my mind again, but soon it passed.

Halion had taken a little portable computer out of his pocket and was typing letters into the keypad. "What is it you're looking for?" he asked, glancing up from it at me. I hesitated, worried that my quest would give away my identity. I glanced around nervously for an exit in case I needed it. "...I'm looking for a PEA that used to belong to someone named... Mr Frog. Would it list that anywhere in there?"

I tensed up, biting my lip anxiously, but to my relief he didn't seem suspicious. Instead, he nodded, tapping the keys as he spoke. "Yep, shouldn't be hard to come up with. ...Ah, here it is already! You're looking for section XFY, position 1393, level 3. That's..." He looked up from his computer for a moment, visually scanning through the shelves. Lifting a careful finger, he pointed towards my left. "That's that way. Just walk past the aisles until you see 'XFY', and then -" He stopped abruptly, putting a finger to his ear, a blank expression on his face.

After several seconds, I queried cautiously, "Is something wrong?"

"No, it's..." he stopped again, listening. "I just got a call on the comm channel - backup military units are wanted at a 'situation' down in D-sector - that's me. Looks like I won't be getting off in an hour," he frowned. "Sorry about this, guess we'll have to talk some other time."

Fortunately by this time I'd regained my wits enough to remember I wasn't even going to *be* there in an hour. "It's all right, you just go do what you need to."

Somehow, I still felt slightly disappointed.

He nodded dejectedly, shutting his computer off and putting it carefully in his pocket. Another two guards brushed past us, headed in the direction of the door. "You coming, Halion?" one called over his shoulder.

"Yeah," he replied, raising his voice over the distance. "I'm just helping someone out." His voice lowered again to a normal tone as he said, "I'm really sorry, Vanya. Nice meeting you, though." He turned, walking quickly towards the door.

I stood silently as he left, only remembering my manners as he walked through the doors. "Nice to meet you too!" I called after him, but my voice echoed eerily in the quiet, cavernous room.

Mr Frog had always said Ballpoint was pure evil. In his words, "*You mindless brutes of Ballpoint Tech - all you can accomplish is petty thievery and senseless destruction!*" I'd only been here twice, and each time, I'd met someone friendly and helpful. I was beginning to realize that if Ballpoint *itself* was "evil"... it didn't necessarily mean that *everyone* here was evil. They were simply employees doing their job to earn a living. Bugi and Halion were friendly, and it seemed likely that many other people in Ballpoint were.

As I walked quietly down the aisles towards my destination, I began to wonder if maybe Eris, Joseph's company, wasn't all evil, either.

Before long, I stood at my destination: XFY, position 1393. The number was marked on the shelf, and the third shelf from the floor was marked 'level three'.

Unfortunately... the spot was empty. Around it were arranged an odd assortment of other PEAs of various designs, but Mr Frog's was missing.

I stopped, frowning. Unless Halion had given me the wrong information, the PEA should've been *right there*. I straightened, looking down the aisles for someone to ask, but the warehouse seemed strangely empty. I could hear footsteps in the distance, but for the most part, the guards seemed to have left.

Not knowing what else to do, I took the backpack off my shoulder and began scooping all the nearby PEAs into it. If Mr Frog's was simply misplaced, I wanted to be *sure* I had it.

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Several minutes later, I was walking down the bulb-lit hallways of Ballpoint's unending corridors with a full backpack slung over my shoulder. Leaving the storage area had been easy: nobody had bothered to check me or stop me, not even the guard outside. In a way, I'd expected it to be more difficult.

As I walked, my mind began to wander again...

Halion had wanted to get to know me. He'd shown interest and actually asked me to lunch. What had Urist done, the whole time I'd known him? It'd been months since we'd escaped, and not *once* had he tried to visit Mr Frog's place. He'd never shown any interest in me at all, instead acting as unemotional as a rock. Was I really that unattractive to him? It wasn't his reaction to *everyone*: as soon as he'd laid eyes on Acetalyta he'd tried to seduce her. Was that all he saw women as good for? Had I completely misjudged him?

I remembered all our conversations, and how he'd acted so gentlemanly and sweet. I remembered his kindness; his understanding. I remembered how he'd almost sacrificed himself to save my life, and my stance towards him began to soften. *Maybe he really did care about me*, I thought, but it wasn't long before I brushed it away with a startling realization. If he'd been trying to get me into bed... *he'd been going about it completely the right way*.

I turned another corner and crossed an intersection, briefly glancing at the floor map. I shook my head slowly, staring at the floor and trying to work it all out. Somehow, I'd had his entire personality all wrong, right from the beginning. He'd *used* me; he didn't care about me at all. As soon as someone easier had come along, he'd forgotten little Vanya, not even caring enough to take my feelings into account as he seduced the commander *right in front of me*. Was I really that worthless to him? There had been *months* where he could've asked me out or made a move on me, but he'd never tried. Was it that he just didn't care? Did he actually find me unattractive?

It hurt. I couldn't sort everything out in my mind, no matter how I tried, but I knew one thing: I was never going to fall for Urist's lies ever again.

Hans had been there too, I remembered... but I didn't feel so hateful towards him. He'd never really done anything to indicate he might like me as anything other than a friend.

A guard rushed past me at a jog. She was aiming a weapon as she ran, as if she expected to encounter an enemy at any moment. But there *weren't* any enemies in Ballpoint, I reasoned. Well, technically, no enemies except...

My eyes widened as I remembered: *I* was an enemy. I didn't have to wonder. Hans and Urist were in trouble.

I rushed forwards, sprinting after her until I caught up. "What's going on?" I asked breathlessly, slowing my pace to match her steady one.

"Not sure. Breach in D-Sector," she replied, her voice shaking in time with her steps.

"Sounds like there might be heavy casualties - think a bomb went off in there, or something, but can't tell much - channels are clogged."

My feet slowed for a moment and I fell behind, as she ran ahead around the curve in the corridor. *Heavy casualties??* What had they done?? I quickened my pace again, praying that everyone - my friends and Ballpoint's employees - were all right.

Up ahead, I heard yelling and the alien, unfamiliar sound of gunfire: sharp blurps and rat-a-tats echoing through the cold metal halls. As I turned another corner, heading towards where we'd arrived, I saw a sight that chilled me to the bone: fallen soldiers lying against the walls, coated in their own blood. The acrid smell of acid, smoke, and burning flesh filled the air. I tried my best to ignore it, walking carefully past the bodies to avoid stepping in anything.

As I turned another corner, I sighted a face I recognized: Halion, lying face up in a pool of blood, panting heavily, his eyes clenched tightly shut.

Crying out, I rushed forwards, falling to the floor by his side. I was dimly aware of the warm, sticky feel of blood soaking into the fabric of my suit, but I didn't care. Tears sprung to my eyes as I examined his wound - a deep gash carved across his torso. With every heartbeat, more blood gushed forth, and as my tears fell like trickling rain I pressed my hands against the cut, trying to close it to keep his life force from spilling to the ground.

He gasped with pain, opening his eyes and looking at me. "Va... V... Vanya... I..." he stuttered, stumbling painfully through the sounds.

I could feel his chest convulsing beneath my hands as he tried to speak, his warm blood flowing between my fingers, and I started sobbing. "Please, don't speak," I whispered through my tears. "You won't die. You *can't*... Just stay calm; *stay with me*."

"I... Va..." he tried to say, and then he stopped. I felt his chest go limp beneath my fingertips as he quieted, the sound of his last sigh gurgling with blood.

I didn't even have to wonder. He was dead. He'd shown me such kindness, and he was *dead*, and it was *all my fault*. If I'd never come to Ballpoint in the first place, he would still be alive, along with everyone else. I'd never seen someone die before, and to see someone die right in front of me as I'd tried to save him...

I staggered backwards, reeling, sick to my stomach. Death has a bitter flavor, a sick, feverish one, like a cold sweat and vomit. Right then I wanted to run somewhere far away and hide, and never have to look at anything or anyone again.

Gunfire echoed down the hallway, but it sounded like naught but a ghost's whispers, aged and distant. I stumbled and fell to my knees again by Halion's side, lowering my head to his and weeping openly. He'd been so kind to me, and now he was... gone.

Something exploded down the hallway, sending pieces of shrapnel clattering and

ricocheting against the walls. A piece bounced to a stop beside me, and I raised my head, looking at it, my mind slowly pulling itself out of the gloom.

I had to go.

But now, I was angry. *Urist and Hans* had killed him, not me. So many people were dead, and it wasn't my fault, but theirs. If they'd done what they were supposed to... if they'd stayed with me instead of running off with that *woman*... none of this would've happened. I heard the sound of another explosion echoing from far away, amidst agonized screams of men and women.

This had to stop.

With a new rage filling my veins, I got up, feeling Halion's blood trickling down the legs of my suit. I heard the gunfire echoing around me, but I stepped forwards firmly, my pace steadily increasing as I passed the corner, running past the medics who were tending wounded; past the armed guards taking cover behind doorways. The hallway intersected with a larger one, heavy metal doorframes interspersed at regular intervals all along it. Ballpoint soldiers were crouching behind the nearer ones, firing spurts of bullets down the hallway. At the far end, a few hundred feet away, I saw a gun emerge from behind a doorframe and fire several rounds before disappearing again - my friends were there.

In total disregard for what was going on, I sprinted forwards, passing the Ballpoint soldiers that were taking cover. "What are you doing?! You're going to get yourself killed!!" I heard one yell incredulously. "Hold your fire! Hold your fire!" another one shouted from behind me. For a moment, the gunfire stopped, and all was silent but for the pained moaning of the injured, and my light footsteps down the battle-scarred hallway.

"She's with them!" someone yelled, and gunfire erupted again as I ducked behind the doorframe, across the way from *Urist and Hans*.

"Where have you been?" *Urist* asked, spraying a few more shots blindly. "We weren't sure how to find you again."

I felt fury welling up in me again, just at the sound of his voice. "I knew how to find *you*," I spat out hatefully. "Just follow the trail of the dead, and discarded women."

"What?" *Hans* looked at me curiously, seeming hurt.

I sighed, frustrated. "Not you, *Hans*. Though I'm sure you've done your share of killing."

"Vanya, take this." *Urist* called out to me over the din, tossing me something.

It was unexpected, and I barely managed to catch what he threw. I paused, examining it in surprise. "It's a gun... I don't want a gun!"

He fired a few more shots down the hallway. "I must scout out the corridor behind us. When I go, fire that to suppress the enemy."

Putting it down, I shook my head negatively. "I'm not killing anyone! I *hate* guns! And you've killed too many people already!"

*Urist* appeared to grow frustrated. "Vanya, I need you covering me, or I could die."

In the back of my mind, the thought occurred to me that if *Urist* died, it might almost be well-deserved. The fact that I could even think such a thing shocked me, and I pushed it away. "Unlike you, I care about the safety of other people. Even the 'enemy'!"

He hesitated, looked at me curiously for a moment. "Just fire it," he said finally, turning and sprinting down the hallway behind me.

Several Ballpoint soldiers appeared in front of us, taking aim. Not knowing what else to do, I snatched up the gun in my hands and pointed it down the hallway, pulling the trigger and praying that I wouldn't hit anybody. As I fired, my arms shook

violently, and the gun's muzzle drifted rapidly towards the ceiling. I hadn't been expecting the recoil, but it did its job anyway: everyone ducked back behind the doorframes.

I put the weapon back down. If that was the last time I ever touched a gun, I'd be glad of it.

"You okay missus?" Hans asked concernedly from the other side.

"I'm *fine*," I shot back. Suddenly I noticed he was tending a wound, wrapping a bandage around his arm with his teeth. I hadn't even realized he was wounded, and I felt awful for snapping at him. "It's just Urist," I explained. "And this isn't my blood," I added, making an offhand gesture at my dripping legs. It reminded me of Halion's death, and the thought cooled me a little. I knew that Hans, at least, wasn't faking his personality, and I didn't feel as hostile towards him. Actually, I felt bad that I'd snapped at him, and was on the verge of apologizing when I heard the piercing sound of someone firing a weapon close by. I looked back and saw Urist rushing forwards with his rifle, throwing himself up against his side of the doorframe as the enemy's bullets clacked against the walls.

"Was it any good?" Hans bellowed over the noise.

Urist nodded, wincing at the loud clangs the projectiles were making. "The hallways behind us appear to be clear, and there is an empty room nearby. We will need to exit through them to a safer location. Vanya, do you have the portal device?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yes, of course I do," I answered. "Can't you see it on my wrist?" I shook the bracelet meaningfully.

Urist didn't reply, firing another round of shots down the corridor instead. After a few moments, he peeked out and fired a second volley. He seemed calm, but I'd never been in combat before, and the battle raging around us was making me nervous. A million feelings were mixing in my mind; I was tired, I was panicked, I was hurt, and I was agitated and confused. All I was sure of was that I wanted to get away from it all.

"Aren't we going?" I asked impatiently. "If we wait, they'll just have time to bring more soldiers in..." Again, he didn't respond.

I decided to venture a peek myself, poking my head out from behind cover. Down the hallway, I could see a few soldiers crouched against the far side. One of them, a woman, jumped out when she noticed me and fired a few shots. I jerked my head back quickly. "Oh, look, Urist, another girl! Why don't you go flirt with her?"

That finally got a reaction out of him - an actual double take. He appeared hurt and confused, and though I partly felt bad about it, a darker part of me enjoyed his reaction.

My enjoyment was interrupted by someone - the woman - rushing in front of us. I heard a burst of gunshots and threw myself against the floor, terrified. When I felt brave enough to look up again, I saw her lying on the ground, blood coming from several wounds. "Oh..." I said, shocked. "Oh... You *SHOT* her. Oh, well, lovely! Do you do that with *all* women when you're done with them?"

Urist only glared at me angrily, something I'd never seen him do before. I shrank back a bit. "Vanya," he shouted, keeping his voice level, "on my signal, run for the corner behind us." Hans fired a few more shots down the corridor as he spoke.

Urist had almost gotten himself shot when he'd tried running for the corner, only a few minutes before. "What???" I asked incredulously, open-mouthed. "Are you trying to kill me?!"

"Just trust me!"

"Trust *you*?? Are you serious?!"

"Of course I'm serious!" he yelled gruffly in frustration as he struck out with his sawpike, beyond my field of vision. I heard the scream of a spinning blade, and the

yell of someone falling to the floor. My head was in a whirl - I didn't even know what to think about anymore. "Do you want us to die?" he asked heatedly.

"Why would I??"

"Now! Hans, Vanya - run!" Urist ordered, and I leapt to my feet. The three of us ran down the hallway as Hans and Urist fired a constant spray of shots backwards.

"No more ammo!" Hans suddenly yelled, and moments later, we turned the corner into a little room. I heard bullets pinging behind us against the floors and ceiling: it'd been a narrow escape.

The room was filled with crates of various sizes, and was as dim as the room we'd ported into when we'd arrived. I took off my bracelet and pushed the little button on it, watching expectantly as the air spiraled into a shimmering mirror. In just a few seconds, the portal would be ready.

The three of us started when an unfamiliar dwarf suddenly jumped out of the shadows, holding a submachine gun. Reflexively, I flicked my wrist out at him as Mr Frog had taught me, and I saw several thin, stretchy tubes fly in his direction.

"All of you, freeze!" the dwarf yelled in an authoritarian tone. "Drop your... wea..."

His eyes slowly closed, and he fell to the floor, the elastic tubes from Mr Frog's weapon stretched to his chest, bouncing up and down slowly.

I held my breath for a moment, staring in shocked surprise as it struck me that I might've killed him. "Wait, is he dead??" I asked, panicked. "Mr Frog said it wouldn't kill anyone... He *can't* be dead!"

Hans seemed on edge. "Guys, we need to go right now," he warned. At the time, no one seemed to hear.

"Is he dead'..." Urist muttered. "Does it matter?" He walked over and picked up the dwarf's weapon. At the same time, the tubes detached themselves and snapped back into place under my arm, making it sting a bit.

Oblivious to everything, I stared at the body, and to my relief I could see the man's chest rise and fall with gentle breathing. "'Does it matter'..." I repeated quietly, absentmindedly: Urist didn't even care. The enemy was the enemy to him; he didn't care if they lived or died; he didn't care about casualties or the feelings of their families. Right then, I decided that it must be nothing to him but statistics. I figured that the pain he caused people must mean nothing to him, whether it be romance or war.

Urist interrupted my thoughts as he stormed back over, glowering at me. "Now would you mind explaining exactly what I'm doing that's pissing you off so much?"

I snapped my attention from the unconscious figure and glared at him flagrantly, narrowing my eyes. "What do you *think* the problem is? Haven't I given you enough hints already? Or are you pretending to be dumb?"

That ticked him off. "What are you talking about?" He leveled a piercing gaze at me, but I stood my ground.

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about!"

"Guys, we gotta get out of here! Those soldiers will be here any second!" Hans interrupted loudly, but we were too involved in our argument to even notice.

"Would you kindly answer my question instead of avoiding it?" Urist said. It seemed almost sarcastic in my ears.

"Would you kindly,'" I scoffed. "Oh, you act so mannerly and gentlemanly, but then you try to get into bed with the first woman you see!"

Both of us exploded at each other, arguing and spitting insults like a verbal catfight. I wasn't even listening to what he was saying, and I don't think he was listening to me, either. We were trying to shout each other, pretty much, and I'll admit he was winning. I couldn't yell as loudly as he could.



"SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

Urist and I stopped midsentence, looking at Hans in surprise and confusion at his outburst. Hans didn't even bother to explain. Scooping us up in his huge arms, he plunged into the shimmering portal.

Everything twisted from reality to a dream as the world transformed from three dimensions to six, to two, to fifty...

We collapsed into Mr Frog's room in a heap, space feeling solid once again. And once again, I was underneath everybody. At least this time, I was facing downwards... but Hans was crushing my leg. Pulling it gingerly out from under him, I tilted my head up from the floor and saw a dark cloak a few feet in front of me. I followed it upwards with my eyes to the unamused, expressionless, critical stare of Mr Frog.

We all got to our feet, brushing ourselves off. Mr Frog shut off the portal, officially ending the mission. It was finally over, and I was very, very glad of it. Everything was quiet - peaceful.

Urist's deep voice interrupted the serenity as he addressed me angrily, continuing our previous conversation. "Trying to 'get into bed' with her? How could you possibly think *that*?" Somehow, I took it as him insulting my intelligence.

I spun and glared at him, my hair whipping about my face. I brushed it out of the way. "Your secret's out, Urist," I said. "You can quit playing charades now and come clean." Beside us, Hans turned away and shook his head resignedly, while Mr Frog stared at us in blank confusion, looking back and forth at us as we argued.

"I have no secrets," Urist shot back.

"It's all been an act! You've been faking your personality, acting like you actually cared about people; acting like a gentleman when in reality you're nothing but a player!"

"A player?? I've told you before, I'm *married*. Are you thick-headed?" I'd forgotten, honestly... but it gave me something else to lash out at him for.

"So you were cheating on your wife when you tried to seduce Commander Acetalyta?" I hated the name.

"Is that what you're upset about? I wasn't seducing her! I was distracting her so I could steal the key."

"Yes, 'distracting her' with your deep voice and muscled arms."

Urist stared at me in disbelief. "Obviously there is no way you will believe me. Why is this bothering you so much??"

"You *abandoned* me!" I said accusingly. "You *lied*, you -"

"*Silence!!!*" Mr Frog roared threateningly. It shocked me back to the present, and I looked at him in surprise. "Did you complete the assignment or not?" he queried. I pursed my lips, slinging the bag off my shoulder and thrusting it at him roughly. "Here." Then I turned back to Urist, still fuming. "I thought I knew who you were. I *trusted* you."

He paused for a moment, looking at me strangely, as if an idea had just come to him. "You *do* know who I am."

"You ran off with the commander!! It was right in the middle of a mission, too!"

"I had no choice. But Vanya..."

"And what got the army after you? Did she figure it out as I did? Did you *shoot* her??" I was fuming, dizzy, and almost in tears. My lower lip was trembling; I didn't want him to see me cry.

"Vanya, stop this," he said, stepping forwards and grabbing my hands. He was trying to calm me down, but it only made me more upset. "Just listen. You're being

ridiculous."

My mind was in a fog. "No I'm *not!*" I cried out in protest as I pulled away, rushing towards my room. "I can't believe I fell in love with you!!"

I closed the door behind me as tears streaked my cheeks, and I looked down at my bloody clothing. I'd gotten up that morning thinking it would be the best day of my life, but now... it was the very worst I could remember. Even worse than when Mr Frog had employed me, even worse than the prison cell near the Spawn. It felt as though nothing in the world could ever be beautiful again.

I peeled off my Ballpoint suit and dropped it into the sink. Turning on the shower, I sat beneath the spray of water as it washed over me like rain, holding my legs closely to me as I wept. The bloodstains on my skin reminded me of Halion's death, and I rubbed at them, but they seemed to refuse to go away. I gave up, lowering my head onto my knees, the warm water trickling down my back. I cried.

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Later, I sat on the edge of the bed. My eyes were stinging from recent tears, my wet hair draped over the shoulders of my regular clothes. I felt clean, though I'd been unable to scrub the feel of Halion's death from my hands. I also felt quieter, and regretful of how I'd been upset at Urist. I'd gotten angry with him for something that wasn't really his fault: we'd only been friends, and nothing more. I'd never had the occasion to feel jealous before, and I hadn't been expecting it. Halion's death had only compounded with the problem, and had gotten me upset at him, when in reality, it wasn't really his fault at all. I realized Urist had been telling the truth: he'd only been trying to get the key. Now, instead of seeing the image of Urist's 'flirting' in my mind, I could see his wink as he tossed me the key; how he'd said "*Convenient*" when we'd met the commander.

I felt awful. I knew I needed to apologize for so many things that I'd said, but I also knew that Urist had probably left. Even so, the more I thought about it, the more I knew: if I wanted to keep our friendship, I was going to have to hunt him down and apologize.

Getting to my feet, I started towards the door, determined to find him, no matter where he was.

It wasn't until later I realized: I'd told Urist I loved him.



HANSLANDA:

Urist and Hans: Dwarven Discord

Urist and Hans stopped outside Mr Frog's doorway, clad in the light gray clothing he had issued them the previous day. It was fairly form fitting and comfortable, as well as being as tough as silk, so Mr Frog had said.

The pair of dwarves knocked on Mr Frog's door, and it swung open immediately to

reveal a irate looking Mr Frog. He glared at them, and said, "You're late. We must hurry. Here are these, and I'll get Vanya." He handed them a pair of odd weapons, then turned and hit a small button on his desk amid the myriad pieces of less identifiable equipment.

Urist and Hans looked at the weapons carefully. One was a large warhammer with one hammer head replaced with a small serrated disk, and the other was a pike with the main head replaced by a similar saw blade. In the middle of the handle of each was a short, recessed stud, perfectly placed to go under the thumb of the user. Urist kept the sawpike, and Hans took the buzzhammer, as Vanya later called them. The two dwarves heard a sound from one of the doors within Mr Frog's room.

A muffled, "Fine!" echoed through the door after the sound, and it slid open to reveal Vanya in a tight fitting jumpsuit of the same color and fabric as Urist and Hans' clothes. She looked the three over quickly, then smiled at Urist.

Mr Frog said, "Get over here, stupid girl." He was still glaring as he said, "I've got an errand to run; I'll be back in a moment. Take the opportunity to say hello, or whatever it is you socialites do." He was already stepping through a door as he did so, and it slid shut behind him.

Vanya stepped forward a bit, and smiled at Urist again. He smiled back, and she said, "Hi!"

Urist looked her over, and it struck him that something was different. He said, "You didn't cover your ears."

Vanya's smile eroded a bit, and she blushed as she said, "I'm sorry. I would cover them if I could but--"

Urist interrupted her swiftly, and said, "It's alright, Vanya. I don't mind." He smiled a little, and said, "You look nice."

Vanya's smiled returned full force and she seemed to glow a little with pleasure. She said, "Really?"

Before Urist could respond, the door banged back open, and Mr Frog stormed in, the glare having, impossibly, deepened. He said, "That's taken care of! Do you remember your mission objectives?" His piercing gaze flicked over them, one by one.

Vanya nodded, and Mr Frog turned, wordlessly, to the empty hoop on the wall, and began fiddling with the controls on the side. A shimmering surface coalesced inside the hoop. Urist and Hans had been informed of the existence of the portal already by Vanya, but the appearance of it was still quite amazing to the two dwarves.

Urist noticed Vanya suppressing a laugh at the look on Hans' face, and he grinned inwardly. Hans was a superstitious enough fellow, but this was too much for him. He'd backpedal a couple steps when Mr Frog appeared behind him, and nearly growled, "No you don't! You have to get in there! Vanya, you go first! Lead them in there so this buffon doesn't get terrified and run out on us!" He easily pushed the burly Hans forward.

Vanya gave the two a strange look, and then Mr Frog growled again, "Move!" Vanya stepped through the portal without question. Urist watched her go through, then realized it was his turn. He gritted his teeth, and tried to put his thoughts elsewhere, then stepped through the portal.

Mr Frog immediately pushed Hans the last few steps into the portal, and once he was through, shut it down.

Urist couldn't begin to describe the feeling of stepping through the portal, but it ended soon enough, and he found himself walking toward Vanya at a brisk pace in a strange little room.

Surprise bloomed on her face, and Urist ran right into her before he could stop himself. He fell on top of her, and she fell onto the steel floor. They lay there like

that for a moment, then her eyes widened and she said, "Ah! Get off!" Urist felt his face redden a bit, and he scrambled off of her. He stood a few feet away, and an awkward silence stretched out. Finally Urist found his tongue and said, "I didn't mean to fall on you." He could feel that his cheeks were still a bit red. Vanya said, "It's all right. It wasn't intentional. You didn't see me there, and I was in the way. It's my fault, really." She was speaking very quietly and swiftly stood up very gracefully. Urist shook his head a bit, and said, "No, no, the fault is mine. I should have been watching." Vanya sidled up closer to Urist, a fey look in her eyes as she gazed up at Urist. "It's okay, really." They stood there for a long moment like that. Urist felt the urge to step even closer to Vanya, and perhaps kiss her. Before Urist could act on his urge, he heard, "No Mr Frog, I don't wanna go in-" And then he toppled forward into Vanya once more, Hans on his back. The three of them untangled themselves, and as Urist stood, he noticed Vanya giving Hans a slitty-eyed glare. They all stood, and apologies were exchanged. Then, they all looked around confusedly. Finally Hans said, "So... You have any idea where we are missus?" In the dimly lit hallway, Vanya shook her head, and the two dwarves saw it easily despite the poor lighting. She said, "There should be maps on the floors of the intersections- I saw them last time I was here. Once we get there, we can figure out where we are." Urist nodded absent-mindedly as he said, "Did Mr Frog inform you of where to find the access key?" Vanya shook her head, and said, "No, he just said that the only ones who have them are higher-ranking officers." Hans also nodded, and rumbled in the depths of his throat grimly, "Well... Let's go find one then."

They started out into the corridors of the strange base, Vanya in the lead. They were moving at a brisk pace, and at one point, Vanya looked back, a distracted look on her face. Urist grinned to himself and said, "We are still here. No need to check on us."

She nodded, only half listening, and pointed up ahead to the approaching intersection, "There's an intersection ahead of us, see? On the floor in the middle there's a map, it should be marked with different places and we'll be able to figure out where we are."

Hans grinned at her back, and said jovially, "Oh, one of them 'You are here' maps, ya mean? Spearbreakers don't have any of them."

Vanya had stopped suddenly though, and a dwarf came around the corner ahead of them, clad in strange armor and carrying an odd device. A gun. Vanya said, "Just keep walking and don't look at him. And don't attack, that gun is huge. It it's a guard, he should just walk on by..."

Urist inwardly winced at the thought of attacking an armed and armored ranged opponent with melee weapons, but before he could foolishly say anything, the guard said, "Halt. State your business."

The guard's voice was feminine, barely, and her visor lifted to reveal a horribly battle scarred face that was twisted into a suspicious glare. She stopped, and said, "I'll need to see your ID."

Vanya stepped forward, and the guard bristled a bit at the movement. Vanya held out her ID card, and said, "Vanya Carena, I'm a-"

"Level three spy." The guard finished for her, the glare deepening. "Yes, don't look surprised. I know the uniforms' color code. You're supposed to be down at the southeast quadrant. Why are you in this portion of Ballpoint?" The guard's eyes

shifted suspiciously across the little group.

Urist thought about his days patrolling his home fortress, and got an idea. He stepped forward and challenged the guard's authority. Only those of higher rank challenge the challenger. He said, "Who wants to know?"

The guard straightened, an odd look on her face, and said, "I'm Commander Acetalyta, it is my business to know."

Urist looked at Vanya, and said quietly, "Convenient." Strange, how easily they had found someone likely to have an access key.

The guard said, "Where's your identification? Don't you have it with you?"

Vanya spoke up quickly and said, "They're with me." The guard slid back a step and her hands gripped her gun a bit more tightly. Urist winced at Vanya's words inwardly. They'd been ill-considered, as professional guards wouldn't accept such an excuse easily.

Urist kept calm though, and stepped a bit closer to the guard, his hands visible, his voice smooth as glass, "We're on an assignment." Such a generic phrase would be commonplace, and unlikely to be challenged. Thinking quickly, Urist also appealed to her vanity, "But... If you would like, I could come back after it's done."

Behind him, Vanya's jaw dropped, but he didn't see. Acetalyta smiled a bit at Urist, and said, "Well, I think that may be against protocol. I may have to take you two down to security." She put gentle emphasis on security, and her smile deepened lewdly.

Hans wasn't a fool, and he stepped forward to support Urist's gambit. Neither was ugly by dwarven standards. Hans said, languorously, "Mmmm, sounds like she caught us. Guess you'll have to take us in."

The Commander turned and started strutting away as she said, "Let's go boys. You two are in big trouble." Urist and Hans stepped close up next to her, and Urist put his hand on the small of her back.

Vanya said, "You can't go yet!" Urist turned, letting his hand slip across the guard's utility belt, and more importantly, her access key. He slipped it off easily, and tossed it to Vanya.

Urist winked at her, then put his finger to his lips and said, "Don't wait up for us."

The last he saw of Vanya was her disbelieving stare. The three dwarves turned the corner, and the Commander almost immediately turned to a door. She winked at them, and opened the door with a push of a button.

They followed her inside, revealing a half-filled storeroom. Urist and Hans exchanged a significant glance as they entered. The Commander stopped in the middle of the room, and beckoned to them lewdly. She was standing hands on her hips, so her attributes were prominently displayed, despite the thick armor. Urist smiled, and stepped close to her as Hans sidled around her side. She frowned after a second, and felt her belt suddenly. Then her eyes widened and her gaze snapped up to Urist, fear in her eyes.

At that moment, Hans slipped his thick forearm across her throat and locked it. Her eyes bulged, and she tried to scratch at Urist, but he grabbed her arms in the crook of his elbows and brought them tight against his body. She scrabbled against their grips on her, but they had caught her by surprise and fully immobilized her. Hans strangled her carefully and finally, she went unconscious.

Hans released her throat and checked her pulse, not wanting to kill her. The two gently set her behind a large crate, and removed her weapons. Then they took her utility belt. They found a rope on a shelf in the room, and tied her up thoroughly. Then the two dwarves stepped out of the storeroom and locked the door.

They walked down the hallway to another intersection, where they studied the floor map carefully. Finally, Hans said, "So... Where do you think we can cause the most trouble?"

Urist read the names of various sections, then finally a cruel grin spread across his face as he said, "Well, I think the Armory means the same thing here as it does back home." Hans looked up at Urist, an awed smile on his face.

Shortly thereafter, they stood outside the doors of the armory. It was, surprisingly, not very well guarded. It consisted mostly of a large mesh wall with a small slot in it which was in front of a desk. At the desk sat a very bored looking human quartermaster. No other guards were visible. The door next to the mesh wall was hanging open slightly. Urist shook his head and whispered to Hans, "Complacent. They've never had trouble this deep in before."

Hans smiled grimly, "Complacency kills. Fischer allus said that." He took the buzzhammer off his back, and stepped through the door into the armory. The quartermaster looked up at him quizzically, then abruptly realized that this large dwarf was holding a melee weapon in a threatening manner. The human reached for his hip holster, but found his pistol missing. It was in the desk.

Hans smiled at the human, and stepped a bit closer, "Hiya. Just lay down right there, would you?" The human smiled weakly, and complied. Urist stepped in, and closed the door. He strode to the shelves, and started rummaging through them swiftly. He gathered up a couple large guns for him and Hans, then one for Vanya. He picked up a belt of odd little cylinders, and looked at them curiously.

Urist turned to the prone quartermaster and said, "Hey. What are these?"

The human's expression was priceless, and unthinkingly, he said, "Grenades. You pull the pin and throw them."

Urist smiled, and asked, "What happens then?"

The human grimaced as he realized the dwarf hadn't known what a grenade was, but said, "They explode."

Urist's face scrunched up and he cocked his head, "What is an explosion?"

Hans said, "Like when rock caves into magma I think. Vanya said something about it."

Urist nodded, and strapped the belt of grenades on. He rummaged through more shelves, and handed Hans a gun belt with a pistol in it, then strapped one on himself. The two dwarves smiled as they surveyed their new arsenal of weapons. Hans stepped to the door and opened it back up. Urist joined him.

The human looked up, and saw his chance. He slid open the drawer and snatched his pistol out. His first shot drilled into the wall next to Hans, then the next grazed Hans' arm. Urist whipped out his pistol, and fired several shots into the prone human, more than one hitting the man in the face. Urist grimaced at the mess left behind, but put it out of his mind. It had been life or death.

Hans also sported a grim look, but he looked at the armory. He said, "What about all this? What should we do now?"

Urist shrugged, and then got an idea. He pulled one grenade off the belt, and pulled the little pin. A small red light blinked on momentarily, and Urist chucked the grenade into the armory. He pushed Hans out and slammed the door shut behind them. They took off at a run down the hall, when a tremendous sound filled the corridor. It was like the sound of a cave-in multiplied by a thousand. A wave of heat passed over the two dwarves, and tossed them to the floor.

They slowly got up from the prone position, their ears ringing and their clothes hot.

Urist smiled at Hans and said, "I liked that!"

Hans cocked his head, and held a hand up to his ear and said something.

Urist said, "What?!"

Hans said something again, but this time Urist realized that the shape of his lips were that of someone saying, 'what?!'. Urist waved his hand as if to dismiss the discussion, then pointed forwards. They ambled down the hallway, to a large door.

Hans hit the button next to it, and the door slid open easily. Inside the door was a massive chamber, in which large vats were lined up in rows. They reached to the ceiling, masses of piping and wiring connecting them to each other and the walls. Urist and Hans eyed it confusedly, and then saw a guard sprinting between the vats at them. He was holding a gun, and shouting something. They still couldn't quite hear, but it didn't matter.

Urist aimed his pistol, and fired a single shot. It sparked off a vat next to the guard, who dived for cover behind some piping. Hans ducked behind a large barrel, and Urist followed him as the guard returned fire from behind his cover. As their hearing returned, the two dwarves heard shouting in more than one voice, as more guards joined the first.

Hans popped up, rifle in hand, and fired a burst at one guard. Several rounds caught the soldier in the chest, and hurled him back with the force of the impact. He fell to the floor, unmoving. Hans looked at his rifle admiringly, then the return fire drove him back into cover. Urist nodded at Hans, then slid out to the side, and fired several rounds.

The firefight continued for a short time, but every second, more soldiers were arriving. They moved up in squads, from cover to cover. Urist shouted at Hans over the din of fire and counter-fire, "We've got to get out of here! They're going to cut us off!" Hans nodded, and fired a few rounds, then gaped as almost a whole company of soldiers suddenly burst into the chamber, guns blazing. The rounds blanketed the cover the two dwarves hid behind, and Hans dropped behind his cover immediately. Urist pulled off a grenade, and pulled the pin. He waited for the small red light, and then tossed the grenade over his cover without looking. The blast washed over their cover, and Urist chuckled at the sudden absence of gunfire. Hans peeked over the edge, and his jaw dropped. Urist was reloading while Hans tried to get his attention. "Urist. Urist! Urist, we've got to go!"

Urist slapped the magazine in, and popped over the cover to be greeted with a horrifying sight. The grenade blast had been centered right under one of the vats, which were apparently filled with some sort of caustic acid. It was spurting from the severed pipes and a couple rents in the metal of the vat. The vat hung crazily from a single damaged strut and swayed gently as the strut slowly stretched toward the breaking point. The soldiers facing the two dwarves were still stunned by the explosion, and hadn't spotted the danger yet.

Urist and Hans dove out of cover, and bolted for the door, right as the strut finally gave. The vat bounced off the floor, and its damaged structure warped fully, the smaller rents ripping through the tough metal under the weight of the vat, and the acid within pouring out in a deluge. It swept the soldiers nearby up and rushed toward the two dwarves as they rushed out the door. They shut it as they exited, stopping the acid from engulfing them, but were faced with another problem.

Yet more soldiers were rushing toward the sound of the second explosion, guns at the ready. The two dwarves were almost right in the middle of a squad of soldiers armed with rifles, so they let their guns hang loose and whipped out their melee weapons. Hans blasted the hammerhead of the buzzhammer into the skull of a slim elf male that was starting to aim his gun, shattering the poor creature's head so thoroughly it looked as if he'd been decapitated. Urist plunged his sawpike through the chest of an armored dwarf, and into the throat of the human behind him. It lodged firmly in the dwarf, and Urist let go of it. He grabbed his rifle, and fired it from the hip into the next two soldiers. The rounds blasted them off their feet, spattering blood against the walls and Urist's face. Urist yanked his sawpike out of the dead dwarf, and turned to watch Hans.

Hans faced a young, blonde-haired soldier who's rifle was aimed at him. Hans swept his hammer around in a tight arc, twisting the rifle out of alignment and sending the

burst the soldier had fired into the wall and floor. He pushed the younger soldier back forcefully, bouncing him off the wall, then swept his hammer through a short arc, letting the buzzsaw rip through the soldier's chest. The younger soldier's eyes widened as blood spurted from him, and he fell onto the floor, in shock.

Urist and Hans surveyed the gory remnants of the squad they had blundered into, when a burst of gunfire forced them to retreat down the hallway into the cover of some doorways. Urist chuckled another grenade toward where they had slaughtered the squad, and hunkered behind his cover as it went off.

Then the two dwarves fired blindly around the corner, Urist crouching low so Hans could shoot over his head. Hans blind fired again, and Urist popped out, gun ready. As the sounds of fire from Hans burst died away, several soldiers ran around the corner, guns up. Urist blazed away at them on full auto, killing several, and mortally wounding another. The wounded one fell back into the safety of the corner, but farther down the hall, more soldiers were taking cover and firing on the two dwarves.

Urist fired blindly, and threw another grenade he'd readied with his other hand. It exploded, buying them a moment of silence once more. After the brief reprieve, Urist blind fired again. He heard, "What are you doing?! Hold your fire! Hold your fire!" as the sounds of running echoed down the hallway.

Then "She's with them!" and the gunfire erupted again as Vanya skidded around the corner behind the doorway. She was panting and had a grim look on her face. Urist fired a few more rounds, and said, "Where were you? We weren't sure if we'd find you again." He realized that they hadn't even discussed how to return to Vanya, which was a tactical mistake in addition to a thoughtless one. She was the one wearing the bracelet to return them home, and also the one who was supposed to have got the PEA.

She almost snarled at him, "I knew where I'd find you. Just follow the trail of the dead, and discarded women."

Hans looked at her, his eyes filled with hurt, "What?"

Vanya sighed, frustrated, "Not you Hans. Though I'm sure you've done your share of killing."

Urist unslung the third gun he carried, and said, "Vanya, take this." He tossed it to her, and she barely caught it in her confusion.

She stared at it, a bit surprised, "It's a gun... I don't want a gun!"

Urist popped out and fired a burst down the corridor, then dodged back before he could get hit by return fire. He said, "I must see if the corridor behind us dead ends. When I go, fire it to suppress the enemy."

Vanya set the gun on the floor, and shook her head, "I'm not killing anyone. I hate guns! And you've killed too many good people already!"

Urist was too stressed and confused to understand what was making her resist this so much, and he said, "Vanya, I need both you and Hans covering me, or I could die."

Vanya spitte him with a glare, and said, "Unlike you, I actually care about the safety of other people. Even the 'enemy'!"

Urist paused in his adrenaline fueled haze, and thought for a moment. He looked at her for a long second, and then finally said, "Just fire it." He turned and ran without making sure she would do so. He sprinted into the room at the end of the hallway, and looked around for doors. There weren't any but the one he'd entered through, so he turned back.

Hans was wrapping his arm up in a bandage as Vanya fired a wild burst around the corner. He asked, "You okay missus?" She sure seemed out of sorts. Normally she was so nice.

She snapped out, "I'm fine." Then seemed to regret it, and continued as she dropped

her rifle, "It's just Urist. And this isn't my blood."

Hans nodded absent mindedly as he finished tying off the bandage. He would puzzle over her behavior more when they were out of combat, know that he knew she was unharmed. Meanwhile, Urist returned, sprinting wildly into the cover of the doorway. Hans said, "Was it any good?" The clang of bullets on metal walls punctuating his question.

Urist winced at the gunfire as he nodded, and said, "The hallways behind us appear to be clear, and there is an empty room nearby. We'll need to exit through them to a safer location. Vanya," He said, shifting his focus to her, "Do you have the portal device?"

She rolled her eyes and shook her bracelet at him like he was stupid, "Yes, of course I do, can't you see it on my wrist?" Her voice was filled with choler, but Urist let it wash over him. Something must have happened while they were separated to make her so angry.

He felt his beard tingle a little, and his eyes dilated. He leaned around the corner, rifle leading. He fired a few blind shots, then shrank back a bit to avoid the return fire. Once it stopped, he leaned back out, and fired a couple aimed bursts, taking out at least one more soldier.

Vanya said over the din, "Aren't we going? If we wait, they'll just bring more soldiers in..." Urist didn't bother telling her about the squad forming up to rush them, instead getting a hold of his sawpike. Vanya waited a moment, then peeked around her corner. A burst of fire down the hall almost hit her, and she flattened back against the wall, in cover again. She spat, "Oh look, Urist, another girl! Why don't you go flirt with her?"

Urist lost his concentration at this, the words cutting deep through his military mind. He looked at Vanya, his face twisted with hurt and confusion. Her expression was twisted between shame and pleasure, but before Urist could say anything, he heard the footsteps of the squad coming out of cover, lead by a human woman. Urist fired a burst into her from the side, and Hans blazed his rifle into the midst of the squad, either killing them or forcing them back to their cover.

Vanya was curled into a tight ball by the wall. After a moment like that, she peeked out, her face white and twisted with fear. When she saw the dead woman, she went livid with color and said, "Oh..." Then, louder, "Oh, you SHOT her! Oh, well, lovely. Do you do that with *all* women when you're done with them?"

Still hurt from her last comment, Urist let his emotion over take his judgment, and glared at her. She shrank back from his gaze, looking away from him. Finally, Urist regained control over himself, then said, "Vanya, on my signal, run for the corner behind us. Hans was blind firing as Urist spoke.

Vanya gaped at Urist, then said, "What?! Are you trying to kill me?"

Urist shook his head, and shouted, "Just trust me!"

"Trust *you*?? Are you serious?!"

Urist turned, as another soldier came around the corner, and thrust his sawpike into the man's chest, ripping his upper body to ribbons. As he did so, he shouted, "Of course I'm serious!" The firefight slowed for a moment, and he said, in a rage filled voice, "Do you want us to die?"

"Why would I?" She shouted back, her face showing her confusion and trepidation.

Urist shook his head and shouted in his best instructor's voice, "NOW! Hans, Vanya - RUN!" Without thinking, they all did so, Urist and Hans firing furiously over their shoulders as they sprinted for the end of the hallway. A quiet click when unnoticed until Hans shouted, "Out of ammo!"

They burst into the room just in time, Hans dropping his rifle to the floor in disgust. It was a storeroom, just like the first room they'd arrived in. Vanya hit the button on her bracelet. The portal shimmered into existence, when suddenly a dwarf in civilian

clothes, nonetheless holding a submachinegun in his sweaty hands, jumped out from behind a stack of crates. He shouted, "All of you, freeze!" Vanya flicked her arm, a look of fear on her face, and several long, clear tubes flashed across the distance between her and the dwarf instantly. They plunged into his chest, and he said, "Drop... Your wea..." Even as he was passing out.

Vanya's face twisted into a look of horror, and she said, "Wait, is he dead? Mr Frog said it wouldn't kill anyone... he can't be dead!"

Behind Urist, facing the door, was Hans and he said, "Guys, we need to go now."

Urist ignored him, and walked over to pick up the dwarf's weapon.

Urist mocked Vanya's voice, adopting a terrible falsetto, "'Is he dead'... Does it matter?" He picked up the submachinegun, and shook his head ruefully.

Vanya seemed lost in thought, and she quietly said, "'Does it matter'..."

As she did so, Urist was glowering at her, "Now would you mind explaining exactly what I'm doing that's pissing you off so damn much?"

Her head snapped up, and her eyes narrowed to slits, "What do you think the problem is? Haven't I given you enough hints already? Or are you pretending to be dumb?"

Urist's features twisted in confusion, "What are you talking about?" Hans gestured at the portal.

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about!" Vanya shot back at Urist.

"Guys, we need to go right now." Hans said, still gesturing. They weren't listening though, so embroiled in their argument. Hans said again, "Guys, we gotta get out of here! Those soldiers will be here any second!"

"Would you kindly answer my question instead of avoiding it?" Urist said caustically.

"'Would you kindly,'" Vanya mocked him in an ironic echo of his earlier statement,

"Oh, you act so mannerly and gentlemanly, but then you try to get into bed with the first woman you see!"

The two exploded into a vicious argument, neither making any real sense, just shouting at each other as loud as they could. Vanya seemed to be getting more and more upset, and Urist was getting more and more angry. Hans just watched them in utter disbelief, when something thudded against the door.

Hans glared at them suddenly, then said, "Shut the fuck up!"

They stopped arguing and turned a confused look on him at the same time. Hans scooped them both up in his huge arms, and pushed through the portal.

They lay in a heap at Mr Frog's feet. He looked at them curiously, then shut off the portal. "Trying to 'get into bed' with her? How could you possibly think that?" Urist growled at Vanya as they all stood.

Vanya twisted to face him, her eyes full of vitriol, "Your secret's out, Urist," She said.

"You can quit playing charades now and come clean." Hans was shaking his head in frustration beside them, and Mr Frog was blankly watching this little drama, no thoughts showing on his inscrutable sneer.

"I have no secrets," Urist shot back.

"It's all been an act! You've been faking your personality, acting like you actually cared about people; acting like a gentleman when in reality you're nothing but a player!"

"A player?? I've told you before, I'm married. Are you thick-headed?" Urist was gesticulating, obviously angry.

"So you were cheating on your wife when you tried to seduce Commander Acetalyta?" Vanya said, her eyes flashing.

"Is that what you're upset about? I wasn't seducing her! I was distracting her so I could steal the key." Urist objected vociferously.

"Yes, 'distracting her' with your deep voice and muscled arms."

Urist's anger was replaced with confusion suddenly, "Obviously there is no way you will believe me. Why is this bothering you so much??"

"You abandoned me!" Vanya accused him. "You lied, you -"

"Silence!!!" Mr Frog roared threateningly. The two stopped arguing from the brute force of his personality, and he more calmly asked, "Did you complete the assignment or not?"

Vanya's lips twisted into a sad frown as she ripped the backpack off her shoulders and thrust it into Mr Frog's chest. "Here." She turned back to Urist, anger returning to her features. "I thought I knew who you were. I trusted you."

Urist was struck, suddenly, by the memory of her kissing him outside Hans' room, and he desperately said, "You do know who I am."

"You ran off with the commander!! It was right in the middle of a mission, too!"

"I had no choice. But Vanya..." His anger was gone, replaced by sudden understanding.

"And what got the army after you? Did she figure it out as I did? Did you shoot her??" Her voice was shaking, and she wouldn't look at him.

"Vanya, stop this." Urist stepped closer to her, and gently grabbing her delicate hands. "Just listen. You're being ridiculous." He winced inwardly at his poor choice of words.

"No I'm not!" Vanya yelled at him, ripping her hands from his, and dashing away into her room as she said, "I can't believe I fell in love with you!!"

The door to Vanya's room slammed shut. Mr Frog and Hans both turned to look at Urist, who was standing frozen in place, his mouth hanging open, his features twisted in confusion and consternation. He finally seemed to come to, and looked at Mr Frog and Hans, his gaze distant. Hans said, "Are you okay?"

Urist said, "Did... Did she just say she loved me?"

Mr Frog snorted derisively and took the backpack to his equipment table as he said, "Yes, she did, you dolt. Whatever you did in there obviously upset her quite a lot, so I wouldn't count on her feeling that way for much longer."

Hans shook his head at Mr Frog's back, and put his hand on Urist's shoulder, "Don't listen to him, Urist. Vanya's just confused. Give her some time, try and talk to her later. For now, let's go get a drink."

SPLINT:

25th Hematite, 207.

Seems I was off on the migrants. Several unfamiliar dwarves shuffled into the mess hall earlier today while I was figuring out the levers (Mitch said he left notes on them. The fucking notes are wrapped around the levers with some combination of old food, booze, blood and vomit.) I went through them, and met two burly dwarfs, a former trader and a dyer. Their names were appropriately Thumper and Crusher. As I figure I need to lose some weight, I figure there is no better way than to finally grab a hammer and start training. The two dwarves will be my bodyguards. And as I plan on training the old fashioned way, it may take some time before I'm skilled enough to join the real soldiers on the battle lines.

Our population currently sits at **103**.

[Fucking ravens are murder on FPS. Plus some idiot left their old coat and shit in the garbage closet so everyone's complaining about the stink. Oh, and I'll come clean now, I used DFhack's Fixmigrant tweak to fix several bugged migrant-traders.]

27th Hematite, 207

I've begun minor renovation projects around the fortress, and in some of the fortifications I've begun thickening the walls and two towers were slightly enlarged.

28th hematite, 207.

I and my guards are running solo drills almost constantly in my quarters and I have moved second squad out to the newest barracks.

I've also decided to give my honor guards their own slightly larger accommodations from the rank and file. I've also ordered a steel sarcophagus made for Fisher, as we found a magnetite cluster for her tomb.

2nd Malachite, 207.

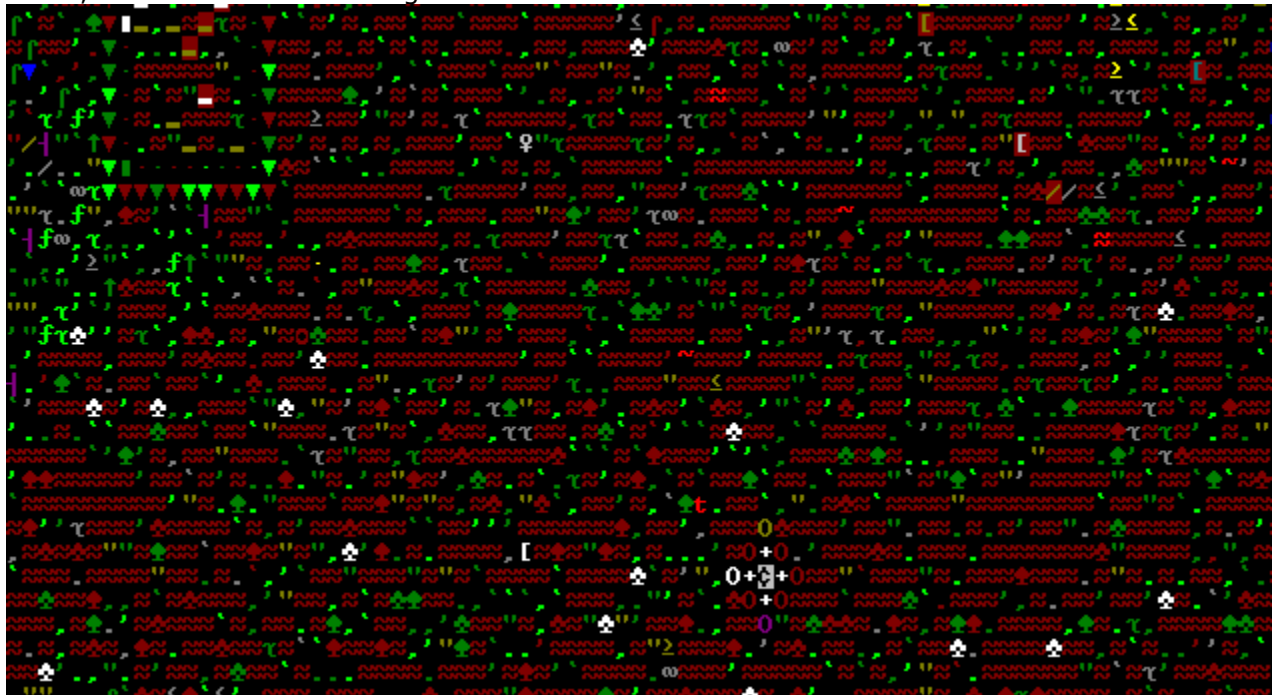
I am concerned for our youths....

Kadöl Ezaruvad, Dwarfen Child has grown attached to a troll fur cloak?

Oh well. A war trophy is a war trophy. Better than some ratty old worn out pig tail fiber thing anyway.

24th Malachite, 207.

So little happened this month it wasn't even funny. A continuing flood of masterwork items, but I noticed something.



The blood plain.... it seems to finally drying up and crumbling into the soil! I.... I don't know what to make of that. I've also begun constrction of the mill. It'll be wind powered, since we lack a proper river.

27th Malachite, 207.

Seems I spoke too soon. Three days later and that horrid blood rain picked up again.

→It is raining mountain barbarian blood!

I wouldn't care so much if it didn't reek like a badly cooked bit of meat.

28th Malachite, 207.

The FROGS on the walls are done. Nothing else of not happened really. Although I noticed many of our old pitchblende stones were used to make cabinets and mugs. I'm somewhat annoyed, but I and my guards have our hammers, so all is well. I've had uniforms commissioned for the three of us as well, made from iron with wooden shields in honor of my Namesake's mighty human armies.

5th Galena, 207.

Took the better part of summer, but the walls and towers are almost finished. Nothing more to report on.

8th Galena, 207.

Mill's finished. Having a mess of idle workers is actually proving beneficial.

12th Galena, 207.

Seems our elevation has attracted the human merchant-nobility! A guild representative was seen among the caravan coming in! I have 1st Squad on high alert, as the enemy enjoys attacking around caravan season. Also, it seems that snatcher may have been alone in their effort at the earlier part of summer.

A Guild Representative from Gugiromon has arrived.

Things seem to finally be looking up.... No necromancers, only a spring goblin ambush.... Perhaps we can finally get that army built following my reign?

[Sorry for so few pics. just nothing happened really worth noting.]

(Splint): The update went fast or seemed to because literally nothing happened except my smaller projects being worked on. And to clarify, I don't like block roads on the surface. Looks too much like a floor. Plus we have more damn raw stone than we could ever hope to get rid of. Hell I think Loud Whispers and three other dorfs have been working on mugs nonstop, and I've set two mason shops to make blocks endlessly; I still ran out of blocks.

Current renovation projects are making paved block roads on all the main paths in the dirt levels. Two new spacious barracks have been complete, complete with sleeping and eating facilities, and a lovely statue garden, with iron, shale, and an electrum statue, as well as using up the last of the spare chairs making pointless little spots of chairs gathered around tables in the garden watch tower. Most of the work I've done took the better part of spring and summer, though the mill was built surprisingly quickly. It's wind powered, with featherwood mills.

Also, due to our massive kaolinite reserves, we will have porcelain bricks galore and porcelain statues if it pleases you guys. Can make ash to make some lovely glazed porcelain statuary. I'm also spoiling my personal guards. Gave them rooms with iron plated floors with porcelain flooring in the doorways.... Don't stare at me like that we have several metric fucktons of iron. Oh and adamantine production is going well. Well over 99, but I may save some strands to make adamantine cloaks and hoods for myself, my guards, and our champion.

[[Talvieno's note: Oddly enough, this spawned a discussion that quickly derailed into another discussion involving alcohol proof. We of Spearbreakers love a good derail.]]

DRACONIK_SANKIS:

Draconik's Introduction to Spearbreakers

After a Week and a half of traveling with the group of migrants Draconik was wondering when Evolution was going to stop slacking and reintroduce Cavemen or some other equally as intelligent a creature, he was also wondering how many ways you could kill a cheese-maker but ultimately a rogue goblin spooked that dwarf right off the side of a nearby brook and he drowned... in a few feet of water. Eventually they came across a sight that almost brought a tear of Joy to Draconik's eyes, The Plain of Blood Spearbreakers's own front door, They quickly made their way to the entry way, stories of Spawn, necromancers and the undead they raised were common in these parts and the other Migrants wanted to get out of the blood rain, Draconik meanwhile after ensuring that no dwarves saw him, drained his tankard and strolled towards the Entry to the underground fortress, pausing only to duck under the roof as it was definitely not made for someone his height.

Recalling the Maps his Agents had sent before his departure, he quickly made his way to the "Hospital" home to a full ninety percent of Parasol's agents in Spearbreakers, namely three of four. As he entered he quickly noted a dwarf tied to a traction Bench before one of the orderlies brought him to the others and closed the door behind him. "Alright you three give me a quick report and possible spots to setup my labs. We'll go into more details at a later date." Draco said his eyes resting on each agent who for confidentiality purposes remained unknown for now. A Female doctor spoke first, "Sir due to a overhaul by Mitch fatalities are down, aside from that there's a abandoned garbage dump plenty of space and no-one goes there and it has a raised roof...", "Don't Forget about Joseph!" a younger orderly spoke before the doctor glared at him bringing about silence but Draco quickly raised his hand for her to stand down, "Who is this Joseph, and how does he jeopardize the mission?" said Draco. "He's a Third party Sir, the Third agent spoke, he's been friendly to Talvi and for awhile we thought him to be a myth, however recent events between Mr. Frog and that elf have led us to believe otherwise." "Very Well, Draco said, I'll go to the dump and clear out space for my purposes, you! He said pointing at the young orderly, are the only one to enter there and disrupt my thoughts in case any issues arise, Oh and by the way no Period in his name, the Mr is part of the name, not a title." And with that he left the room, spotting the fact that the dwarf on the traction bench had started to crawl away he made a quick dash to the dwarf lifted him and slammed him onto the traction table before tying the ropes into a double reef knot, "Rest My Friend, Draco oozed as he injected a powerful tranquilizer into the dwarf's system, You'll need it."

Later that Day in the abandoned Garbage dump Draconik moved away the last bit of refuse from the area he had claimed as his own the bits of corpses arranged to form a grim macabre style wall as he searched his area for electronic bugs. Coming away with no less than twenty nine cameras and forty seven microphones later made Draconik think back on the name Joseph, Quickly Setting up his Research equipment the mobile BATTERY his MWS and the DAL storage unit he turned on his computer to

be greeted by a face.

"Good Day Sir, I can see Transfer from Lab Six to Spearbreakers was a Success, how May I assist you today? Rang the cheery melody that was Frost's his Digital Assistant's Voice." "Frost I need a Omicron level sweep on the Name Joseph in company records, namely rivals."

"One Moment Sir, Frost rang", after a brief moment as he finished setting up the equipment Frost rang back "Sir there are Two Entries on Joseph, one is as Talvi's Imaginary friend and the other is... interesting sir." "How So Frost? Draco asked," for if Frost found it interesting then he was sure there was trouble behind it. "Its Lab Director Classified at the highest level sir but it calls for a level one decontamination of affected zones sir... Frost said" with what could only have been a electronic verison of a shiver. "Level One hmm?, Draco Mused" as he pulled a bit of dried ratweed from one of the gift packages and wrapped it in a bit of paper, "Quite Serious as only Directors may deal with those, quite a bit more than my field recon on planetary stability and finding out who's bright idea it was to reintroduce the Spawn after the HV-1 outbreak." As Draco and Frost Discussed these matters they were aware of the other devices around the dump, zooming in and listening in on their every word, what they didn't know were the groups watching them. Mr Frog and his assistant watching the lead Parasol Agent since he'd entered the dump, Joseph brought to attention by mention of his name grinning in amusement as to Parasol's increased Involment. And One Graying old manager at Ballpoint Inc Wondering just what Parasol Was up to.

Parasol Database Entries

DAL: DALs are advanced A.I Constructs who serve their Director and detonate their labs upon death on the field.

Level One Decontamination: Systematic destruction of affected areas until purification is ensured or world is Terminated

HV-1 outbreak: Due to Contamination of Everoc's DNA Pool with Lab Six Personnel DNA namely *Classified* the disease Hemophilia Vampirism was released into the world, those who suffered from the condition became known as Vampires.

XAHNEL:

23 Hematite

I've settled into my room. The Overseer, a solid dwarf named Splint seems unsure of what to do with me, since I showed up alone. I haven't been assigned a job, so I just try to be useful hauling things around. Another test of toughness, and it'll help make my upper body strength increase. With the bigger loads, my shadow helps, making the floor underneath it frictionless, the load gliding along on shadows.

Watched the soldiers train a little this afternoon. One of the squad leaders, whose name I choose not to remember, tried to talk me up. "A pretty girl like you shouldn't be watching big strong men commit acts of violence. Why don't I show you a different kind of act?" I gave him my backhand, but that only made him smile wider. "Why, how comradely!" Suddenly he looked at his armor, and started muttering. I doubt he realized he was still pretty loud. "You just don't fulfill me like you used to! A dwarf has needs!" I started backing away, but this got his attention. "Wait up, beautiful!" I frowned, and as he got close, I slipped to the side, and tripped him. Once he was on the ground I told him quite simply that if he tried to touch me, I

would break every bone in every finger and then pull out his nails.
Question for consideration: What kind of fucked up guy thinks a bitch slap is "comradely"?

25 Hematite

Apparently, those migrants I was with weren't the only ones in the caravan. Two groups had set out, and I just had the bad luck to be in the group that got ambushed. There were four others, so I figured these guys got attacked too. The big difference seems to be the two big fellas, Thumper and Crusher. They look like they could kill a goblin by grabbing his head in one fist and squeezing. Overseer Splint took them on as bodyguards, then began training. I asked him about the possibility of a job, but he said he would get back to me later. Looks like more crap hauling.
Question for further consideration: What the hell is it with the mugs? There are fucktons of them.

27 Hematite

Overseer Splint has begun a project, making improvements to the fort's defenses. I helped by dragging rocks.
Armokdammit, I'm *BORED*.

1 Malachite

Still no sign of the Spawn. Of course. A few of the people around here are telling me that everyone here has some kind of hammer training, and that everyone has a hammer. Seems one of the other OS had the idea of training the non military so they can defend themselves in an emergency. Great idea. 'Cept for one teeny problem. I don't have a hammer. So, in a fort of toughs, I'm the wimp. I hate being the wimp. Gimme something to do, Splint...

7 Malachite

Watched the soldiers training more. That jackass from before didn't see me, so, I was free to observe him get his face pounded a few times. He thanked the person who punched him each time. It's like his face is numb to pain or something. I've probably underestimated his strength, but he still gets no respect from me. I *will* break bones if he tries anything.

24 Malachite

The only reason I'm writing is to record for posterity that the sea of skyblood is drying up. Everything exciting I've heard is either absent or becoming so. I'm going to murder someone if I don't get a job. I swear to Armok I am. More rock hauling. Maybe if I bricked up Splint's room while he was in it, he'd pay more attention.

27 Malachite

It's raining blood. Holy fucking Armok, it really is raining "grade a" hundred-proof smells-like-bacon *BLOOD*. If I was a vampire, this place would be fucking paradise. As it is, that scent is making me hungry. Wonder if we have any bacon? Or maybe fried lizard nuggets.

28 Malachite

Dragged some caged animals around so they could be hung from the wall. Apparently it's a security system, as they set up an unholy racket anytime they spot enemies. It's a very nice idea. Effective. Some guy named Mr Frog (he was emphatic that there be no period) was watching to make sure things were done properly. He

looks a bit like me, taller and thinner than the average dwarf. Maybe one of his parents was human?

10 Galena

Bored again. Helped build a mill. Helped as in more dragging shit. If I can just find a spare knife and a snatcher, I'll prove my worth with a goblin barbeque. The walls and towers are practically done too. With even that over... Maybe I'll start smacking Splint every day until he puts me on something.

[[Talvieno's note: Following this is a huge semi-derail debating Rose's character, and in particular, the mysterious and infamous "Halen".]]

LLASRAM:

The journal that is completely devoid of any timeline crap, just the rambling of a dwarf.

The following is a shoddy, unidentifiable leather journal with the name, llasram, branded onto the cover

I was walking down the halls today, when a solder ran into me, and the alarm was not even ringing. Instead of helping me up, every dwarf just ignored me! I decided to vent my anger. Dwarfs here may call the soldiers important, but without us miners, we would be forced to live like elves or humans! They also think the armories are awesome, but without us miners, they would not have any metal to smith. The smelters also would not have any ore to turn into metal without trading for it, the same with the armories I guess. The smelters also would have to rely on fuel other than magma, and it's not easy to do. The soldiers think they are the best of all dwarfs, but us miners know we are not the most important. That honor goes to the various types of farmers that supple food, booze, plant fibers and such. Without them, we would starve to death eventually. Right below the farmer are the dwarfs that chop down the trees. They are the ones that supply the wood for our beds and barrels. Speaking of, whenever elves come (and survive the outside) to trade, I laugh to my self because they glare at us when they see doors and beds and such made out of wood that we are not trading. They cant do anything because unless they got a closer look, which would never happen, they can't see the unique grain texture their wood has compared to normally grown trees. One good thing about soldiers is they have good friendships with each other, and their weapons and armor, while us miners only see each other when working on the same tunnel as another, or during the famous party that last too long. This is just fine with me, as I don't really like other dwarfs, but I will drink a few with my friends. I'm sorry, but I just needed to get that all out of my head. That brings me to another point, the Spawn. Merchants and new migrants always say it's amazing that we can deal with it, and ask how we do, but the truth is that we have different methods. Mine is imagining that they are saying hello, constantly, never ending... I need a drink.

I just realized something, in order for us miners to dig stone, we need to have METAL picks. To get those pickaxes, the smiths used smelted ores. In order to get that ore, a pick was needed... what came first, the ore to be smelted, or the pick to dig more ore. We could have originally used stone picks, but where did we get that stone one? Would it even work? We would have needed a pick to get that stone.

Same deal as with metal picks.

I hate when I think. I'll see if a really long tunnel needs to be dug, or something similar. Also, I still have yet to find a dwarf that can say what kind of leather this journal is.

DRACONIK_SANKIS

Draconik Parasol Scientist creates a Bio-Mass Storage Unit

Draconik adds the water to the unit and lights a small fire under the device as he strolls over to a corner of his makeshift lab and his red stained tankard quickly adding together a large amount of the red liquid with a powerful painkiller Draco downs the brew and lets the concoction take affect before removing both his overcoat and the crisp White/Red uniform that laid under it to reveal a tangled network of scars and one recently sealed wound, untying the knot at one end Draco removed the stitch and with a deep exhale plunged his hand into his chest, mere moments later he started his violent coughing fit as he removed the cause, a lump of bio-mass the size of a plum, setting the lump into the glass dish nearby he took anew thread and resealed the wound, then he took the dish and placed it upon the spawn teeth and sealed the machine except for the feeding slide and the furnace, the steam produced who keep the mass alive long enough to bring it to phase two which it could then be utilized versus the spawn, with that knowledge and after throwing a rat carcass into the feed slide Draconik turned his attention to his computer which had just come up with a alert about temporal distortion.

Parasol Weapons Archive

Bio-Mass:

Gathered from Universe *Classified* this Bio-weapon actually grows as it consumes organic material although it can be programmed to only consume certain Organic type-sets (living or dead) although in absents of viable food sources it will revert to its default of ALL organics. (Extreme Caution required for operation as planets in Universe *Classified* were completely absorbed by Bio-mass)

[[Talvieno's note: Following is a lovely little debate where I went science police on everyone. It menaces with spikes of lasers, asteroids and atomic mugs.]]

[[Talvieno's note: This is following the massive Rose/Halen derail. It was supposed to end the derail once and for all. As would be expected... it didn't.]]

MR FROG:

From Ballpoint Tech's Public Servers

Neoshadows are strange entities native to a certain group of worlds. Visible light is anathematic to them; they can only survive in areas below a certain threshold of illumination. Any part of a neoshadow's body that is exposed to light above this threshold will steadily-disintegrate, its mass slowly being converted to radio waves; having small parts of their bodies illuminated is not immediately-dangerous, though any exposure results in loss of mass.

Neoshadows are entirely-amorphous, capable of changing shape at will. Their malleability is such that they can even change the texture of their body's surface, becoming slick, rough, or sticky as the situation warrants. When in a sufficiently-large dark area, neoshadows typically take the form of a grotesque humanoid.

Neoshadows can turn invisible at will when not illuminated, though being exposed to light above a certain threshold forces them to become visible. When visible, they appear to be composed of a black, tar-like substance.

Neoshadows have mass, which changes depending on how well-fed they are; however, they are typically very light, seldom weighing more than a few grams. This lack of mass restricts how much force they can apply to things normally, though attaching themselves to heavier objects (such as a person) increases the amount of force they can effectively exert. Despite being apparently-solid, they do not appear to have a set volume; they can expand or contract at will, though they do have a maximum volume that they cannot expand past and a minimum volume that they cannot become smaller than.

Neoshadows can consciously phase through solid matter below a certain density, though this appears to require a great deal of effort on their part. Flesh and wood can be passed through, though stone and metal typically prevent access.

Neoshadows feed on energy, being capable of absorbing any manifestation of energy that is not visible light and storing it as mass; UV, infrared, and even kinetic or thermal energy are all viable food sources. The stored mass is then used to fuel the neoshadow's movements. The absorption is not instantaneous, instead being restricted to a certain rate; a neoshadow cannot instantly bring an object to a stop by absorbing all of its kinetic energy.

Neoshadows often attach themselves to a living host for multiple reasons; the host provides a convenient, mobile shelter against light, and the neoshadow can leech thermal energy from the host's metabolic processes and kinetic energy as they move. Symptoms of a neoshadow infestation are coldness and increased appetite as well as weakness and sluggishness due to the neoshadow sapping their kinetic energy, though the latter becomes less-noticeable over time as the host's muscles adjust to the neoshadow's interference.

Neoshadows that have attached to a host will typically protect the host at all costs, presumably because the host is a convenient source of nourishment and shelter; additionally, though not truly sapient, neoshadows are reasonably-intelligent -- their intelligence level being comparable to that of a raven -- and it is likely that they develop an emotional attachment of sorts to their hosts. A neoshadow that has recently attached to a host will typically attack anyone who comes close, regardless of their intentions, though they usually become acclimatized to people eventually, and some particularly-docile specimens appear to allow people to approach immediately, without the need for acclimatization.

A single neoshadow inhabiting someone's body is not usually dangerous to their health, though multiple neoshadows infesting the same host can be lethal, as the host is not left with enough energy to sustain their life processes.

Neoshadows, despite their aversion to visible light, are capable of detecting the frequency and direction of electromagnetic radiation that strikes their bodies, allowing them to 'see' all around themselves, albeit with questionable resolution.

Neoshadows appear to hear by detecting vibrations along their bodies; the large

contact area seems to allow them to determine the directions of incoming sounds with great accuracy, and they appear to navigate via echolocation. Additionally, they can vocalize by vibrating the surface of their body to produce sound waves. They possess some linguistic ability, being capable of forming associations between words and actively constructing meaningful sentences, though nuances such as plurals, tenses, or articles are beyond their comprehension.

Neoshadows reproduce via division; any portion of a neoshadow above a certain mass that is separated from the main body will develop its own intelligence and move of its own accord. Portions below the mass threshold remain inert, typically dissolving in the ambient light unless the neoshadow re-absorbs them. It is unknown whether neoshadows are capable of re-absorbing separated pieces that have gained intelligence.

[[Talvieno's note: Mr Frog's second attempt to end the Rose/Halen derail.]]

(MR FROG):

They dumped [Rose] in a backwater universe because leaving their test subjects in the same universe but with altered memories would have been leaving a huge piece of evidence that anyone with the proper stuff could find; Talvi's entries have demonstrated that mindwipes aren't foolproof, and since it'd be obvious something suspicious was up -- bunch of kids vanish inexplicably, turn up weeks later infected by neoshadows and seemingly-unaware that anything had happened -- there'd likely be inquiry, and at some point someone would try a memory drug, at which point every single kid would independently point them towards Ballpoint (one kid could have been false memories, dozens of them all corroborating each other is almost certainly something the authorities would look into). So, they abduct the children from somewhere, perform the tests they need, and then, *after they had finished with the tests*, mindwiped the survivors and dumped them somewhere random where they wouldn't make trouble, possibly implanting tracking devices into some of them for long-term observation.

They probably didn't really care where they sent the kids afterwards, as long as they couldn't reasonably be expected to come back and testify; Rose (one of dozens, perhaps hundreds of 'dumped' children) just happened to end up at Spearbreakers.

Subjects would be enclosed in an isolated holding cell to keep things controlled and scientific. The cells would have been metal-lined to prevent the neos from phasing through the walls and floors and any egress points would be equipped with multiple high-grade floodlights to destroy any neos that try to break out. Tests they likely performed include:

- General physiological stuff: How does the neo's energy-leeching impact the host's bodily functions? They'd likely have performed general endurance tests, likely along with exposure to temperature extremes to test thermoregulation, tissue samples to see the extent to which cell growth is negatively-impacted, and extended food deprivation to see how lack of energy intake of the host affects the neo.

- Immunology: Does the neoshadow, as an invasive element, generate any sort of immune response, or for that matter inhibit normal immune function? Blood tests are likely, along with deliberate exposure to pathogens.
- Mental functioning: Does the neo's interference negatively impact the host's thought processes? General aptitude tests are likely.
- Emotional bonding: When attached to a sapient host, will the neo develop a personal bond with them? Are neoshadows social creatures? What sort of relationship would the host form if the parasite they're infested with can converse? Tests would likely involve introducing agitated animals to the holding cells to see if the neo defends a sapient host more aggressively (which would indicate an emotional bond) and leaving the pair in isolation for extended periods of time to see if they converse.
- Obedience: Can the neoshadow be trained to accept commands from its host? Likely would involve placing a desirable object out of reach of the host and having the host instruct the neo to lift them up so they could get it, possibly with some sort of punishment should the neo not cooperate.

DRACONIK_SANKIS:

Draconik's Discovery

As the data flowed across his screen Draconik processed the information he was seeing, evidently there were working teleportation methods between Spearbreakers and OTHER pocket worlds, Draco saved the coordinates for future study and turned back to the items smuggled to him by the agents. A collection of Spawn parts including one of the obsidian hearts, still in good condition too. He began to examine every aspect of the individual parts as he tried to picture how the whole actually worked. Finally as he went to pour himself another drink he heard the faint sound of droplets and noted with displeasure that his supply had run dry, throwing a small piece of spawn flesh that he had just finished cutting from the heart at the bio-mass he rose and proceeded to the wine stockpile and the blood plains, collecting a generous amount of wine (after a few taste tests to ensure he got good quality) and collecting samples of the constantly falling blood both in his decanter and a few beakers. As he made his way back to his lab he turned a corner sharply and collided with another person, "Pardon me Mr Frog" he said as he moved past before realising that it was indeed Mr frog and took a detoured path back to his lab after ensuring that Mr Frog was a bit busy to follow at the moment. Cursing his luck he settled back at his table and noted that the spawn flesh he'd thrown at the bio-mass hadn't been absorbed yet, quickly cutting off another piece of flesh from the heart he ran another, hurried test upon it came when the results came back he was surprised. Looking at the Bio-mass he knew he'd have to make corrections.

HS-2 Test Result

Comparison HS-2 Sample from database HS-1 and HS-1G archives
 HS-2 genome base 55% HS-1, 15% HS-1G 30% base race maintained
 Archetype Mutated Life-from verses Reanimated Corpse type of HS-1/1G
 Conclusion HS-1/1G = Undead, HS-2 = Living

Bio-mass Settings: consume Dead organics = Settings need recalibrated
[Warning Bio-mass Setting Consume Living Organics targets ALL type set Living]

SPLINT:

An unremarkable looking man laid, head on his desk in his office. He was absolutely exhausted getting things organized properly to finish construction of his trump card, if his city were to come under threat from forces too great for the self-defense army to hold back. He was starting to doze when his monitor began to blink -INCOMING TRANSMISSION- accompanied by a ringing noise. "For the love of... Receive transmission." The man said with great annoyance. Another man appeared on the other end, wearing overly ornate, blood stained armor. The man looked like a giant by human standards, even in a sitting position his upper body barely fitting onto the screen. "What is it Onager. I'm not in the mood to do anything when you get back if you want to go on a celebratory pub crawl." The other man laughed in a gravelly rumbling voice. "Nah man, this isn't a personal call. All business." He said, grabbing some cloth from offscreen. "What is it then?" the man at the desk said, lack of sleep evident in his speaking and bearing. "Well, we got some insurrectionist activity in the countryside..." Onager said absent-mindedly while wiping something clean of blood. "A few Equus, humans, and a dwarf. Pretty well kitted out." The desk man yawned before replying with a simple "And?" "And it isn't.... Well, we may have a small problem Splint." Onager said, lifting a ballistic armor plate that had three holes punched in it, from a pick by the looks of it. It was a red-black camouflage, nothing unremarkable except for one of the pauldrons. It was a symbol many of The Global Coalition nations knew too well.

It had been cropping up among bandits, rebels, and assassins for some time now. Those few taken alive only said they got it from someone or something called "Eris." It was indeed worrying who this "Eris" was, but most nations had simply dismissed it as one of the upstart companies seeking to try and edge out Ballpoint Tech and Stone INC in the personal armor market, as three member nations of the Coalition sported the similar model of armor. "Looks like The Agency was right on their tactics if it was them. Gear not so much. Looks like they only sold these fools a few weapons." Onager continued, throwing the still mostly blood covered armor behind him. "We got a fix on this cell's HQ,* so I was just calling to see if I could grab 1st and 2nd platoons 2nd Company and flatten them." "Of course, just be quick about it. I don't want you guys out there any longer than you need to be." Splint responded. "Yeah yeah, no heroics, no stupid risks, no blind charges at emplaced guns." Onager said. Splint knew the bull headed fool wouldn't listen. He was an assault trooper anyway, so he was sort of required to run in the direction of people trying to kill him. "Thanks boss man. Can you have'em gear up before we get back? I wanna get this done before happy hour." Onager asked, wiping some blood off his dented and pock-marked armor. "No problem. See you when you get back." Splint said as he clicked off the call.

He pushed back a panel on his desk, revealing an antiquated PA system set up, switches marked with the 40 company barracks, R&D, and other vital installations of the city, and flipped the switch to the 2nd company barracks. He grabbed a rather old looking mike and spoke in "1st and 2nd platoons, 2nd Rapid Response Company,

gear up and prepare for deployment. Captain Geysiege has requested you for a raiding op." He clicked off the PA and set the mike back in the panel, then closed it. He looked at the time, 6:30 pm. He should have been home by now....

Splint stepped out into the cool air of early autumn with a sigh. Streets still packed vehicles and creatures of all kinds: Elves, Scythod, Goblins, Dwarves, Humans, Ponies, Manamaids, Bactarians, Mountain Barbarians.... Frankly the city was one giant godforsaken melting pot. It led to a lot of racially motivated and general crime, but proportionally speaking, Sewaturet was one of the safest cities in the world. Splint set down the sidewalk at a steady walk. While he knew his family always got antsy when he wasn't home on time (specifically his daughter) but he was in no hurry. As he approached a main road he saw the small attack craft ferrying the ordered soldiers fly past. He waved at the soldiers on the passenger skids and kept walking. This city was the best he'd ever forged, but he knew it would crumble eventually. He just feared that "eventually" was close at hand.

The above is introducing my Dwarf's namesake, the Global Coalition's capital city, and figuring on a way to have Eris participate in the large scale battle I had initially planned, though largely indirectly. And now for notes.

Splint: He's a figure of legend among many different worlds, and in most places, eh is known only as "The Overseer." He is a genius of logistics and administration, and due to death being no obstacle, he has become quite a fierce warrior as well. Still his main trait known in legend is bringing nations to greatness. Many who wish to lead assume the name in honor of this legend, though few could hope to match him. Dorf!Splint is an example of this.

What he is: He is based partially upon myself and is in essence, a DF player. In logic, he was plucked from his world by Armok himself to serve as a "Jester," as are countless others. He has yet to be retired, with Sewaturet his latest success. The dwarves of Spearbreakers, like many others across the world, are named for the Jesters of Armok. However, among themselves they tend to be called Forumites (A reference to If Bay12 were a Mountainhall.) They all possess the power to respawn, and don't age past their mid to late 20s, unless Armok grants them mercy (returning them to mortal status, where they resume normal aging and if they die, stay dead) rendering them functionally immortal and allowing them to become fierce warriors and logistic and organizational geniuses. Some are seen as heroes and gods, others as cruel despots or demons. many simply call these legends "Watchers." This probably as close to 4th wall breaking as I've ever come.

Insurrection: Anything can and will have militants opposed to it eventually, for whatever fucktarded reason. They're my way to allow Eris to fight in the siege indirectly: By provoking rebel factions to unify and attack the city. Often the only proof of their involvement with these groups is armor that hadn't had the emblem filed off. Effectively Eris shakes up smaller nations and militant groups to fight wars for them. The Cell in question here is just a random faction that is a pawn of Joseph's. And thus more expendable than dwarven children.

The Agency: A strange assassination and intelligence group working for The Global Coalition. They can get information on damn near anyone. And if they can get information on you, they can kill you. Where they operate out of, and what or who

they are is unknown, as they communicate only through their assassins or encrypted text. They're a major player in the background.

* Since Talvieno was confused on that, I figure other might be as well. The cell in question is, as already noted, a throw away rebel group. Joseph is manipulating various belligerent nations not in the coalition and numerous rebellious elements around Sewaturet to fight an open war without actually being tangibly linked, with Eris at worst being considered some upstart arms company that has no ethics regarding who they sell equipment to. This works, as many countries use copies of the armor he uses for his own small "army" or variations of it, and many rebel groups and smaller nations have an emblem similar to his own.

Essentially he has an entire war machine he can employ so long as he can keep those groups on his side and functioning, with other countries not being any the wiser. Joseph is also one of the few entities The Agency can't dig anything up on, further enhancing his seemingly all knowing status. Sorry if it sucks, but I wanted to update the timewar a little bit. And Mr Frog, I'll have to ask you stay your scathing remarks and keep them to yourself, as I wanted to put up something functionally relevant (my will to play DF dropped this afternoon following a hissy fit on my dad's part,) to the timewar plot.

If I need to explain anything more clearly just ask however.

(MR FROG):

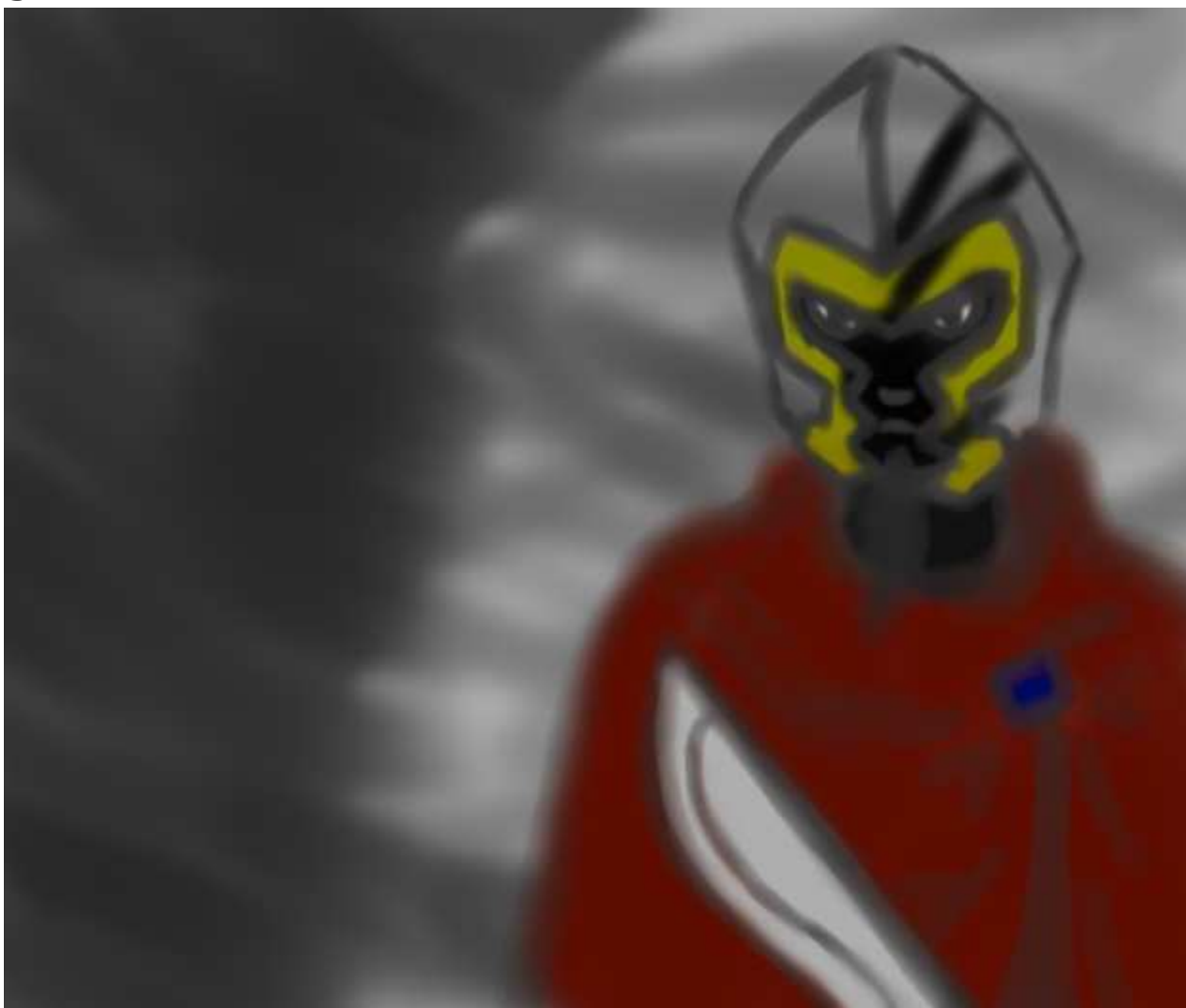
Apparently, it's a good idea for me to share what I'm working on, so here's some random background details about Eris and a couple other things for everyone to disagree with (since I've been doing a very shitty job of communicating these thus far):

- Eris is named after the Greek goddess of discord, and its aim is to disrupt the operations of any entity that has grown too powerful. It operates under the belief that any single entity having too much power without anyone to moderate it is not a good thing.
- Eris's main operations are split among multiple different facilities, each existing in a separate pocket dimension -- however, there are not so many that a coordinated attack could not take them all down. Eris is simply very good at keeping the coordinates of its bases concealed.
- Each base has its own dedicated security force and is kept under constant surveillance by an on-site crew.
- Most of the rest of the world knows Eris as a second-rate arms manufacturer which provides cheap machinery to developing nations. Few outside Eris's inner circle know of its true nature; even some of its employees believe it to be an innocent manufacturing firm, and any who learn of its true nature tend to vanish. [Thanks to Splint for coming up with this.]
- Supplies are delivered to Eris's front operation by third-party suppliers unaware of Eris's true nature, after which Eris's own trusted workers relay the supplies to the bases.
- Joseph himself is sequestered in his own private pocket dimension, which he rarely leaves and even then never for very long; supplies must be delivered,

but Joseph lets them in -- the hyperdimensional coordinates for his lair are never revealed for any reason. It is likely that he has multiple backup lairs, in case the coordinates of his current one are ever discovered. Communications with outside are entirely-remote, and conducted through proxies which are carefully-guarded and equipped with self-destruct mechanisms in case of discovery.

- Larger, more-powerful wormhole tunnelers can place the other end literally anywhere the user has the coordinates to; however, smaller devices like what Mr Frog has in his room must place the other end within a certain radius of another active device.
- Mr Frog is a gnome. There, I said it. We can stop guessing now.

SPLINT:



A crappy drawing of a cloaked Mountain Barbarian warrior armed with a Falchion
Note the helmet, with the brass bit around the face designed the emulate the Holistic
Spawn's maw. Also smeared over the brass is some black warpaint.

(TALVIENO):

Spearbreakers Laws of Interdimensional Teleportation

Due to the conflicting ideas over what teleporters are capable of, our teleportation idea seems muddled. We have spies secretly porting in and out, Mr Frog and Draconik managed to land outside Spearbreakers without alerting the forces inside, there's Splint, Hanslanda, and then I have a whole slew of characters porting in and out, and choosing Mr Frog's portal (the only one in Spearbreakers) to do it. After MUCH thought, I came up with an explanation that works.

- **Portals work by establishing wormholes between two sets of dimensions.** Don't ask how this works, because wormholes are impossible in real life. We're ignoring this.
- **There is ONE outbound portal device in Spearbreakers. This is in Mr Frog's room. It's small; we can call it a "miniportal".** Some of Ballpoint's soldiers possess a similar technology, made portable.
- **All our universes and bubble universes share the same laws** - that's been demonstrated already. Otherwise weird things would be happening like the ability to taste gravity. That's the definition of a different universe - the fundamental laws are different. Thus, these "bubble universes" are attached to the outside of the main one - the Spearbreakers one.(Imagine a floating soap bubble (main universe) with smaller soap bubbles stuck to it (bubble universes), and that's a pretty accurate depiction of how it works... but outside three-dimensional space... Parasol used to be attached to a different universe, but they attached themselves to Everoc's universe. With this established, it takes a huge amount of energy to go back in time or switch timelines/main universes. This is why megaportals (explained further down) are larger, and also part of why people don't really do it. Parasol did it once, to save the Everoc universe from being destroyed by Armok, but that's the only instance when it's been used. However, at the same time, it attracted the attentions of Ballpoint and Stone INC. Doing something big like that can't be done in secret.
- **Wormholes created by miniportals are confined to a single universe and its bubble universes. They can't time travel, switch timelines, or go to other separated universes.**
- **Eris has a huge portal sunk into the ground; we'll call it a "megaportal". Megaportals allow you to switch timelines/travel through time/switch main universes.** However, actually using it to do anything but switch universes is considered taboo - nobody does it.

- **Ballpoint has megaportals too, and so does Parasol.** Megaportals also have the advantage of being able to transport large vehicles like Splint's Moghoppers and Octavians.
- **Any size of portal can establish a connection to anywhere, without needing a portal at the other end to hold it open.** This is unlike Stargate, but it's a necessary law.
- **Communications devices can create portals on the near-microscopic level to convey signals to other universes. Not all communications devices have this function, and those that do are expensive to manufacture.** This explains our occasional interdimensional communication, such as Joseph talking to Mr Frog.
- **Portals log all places they've been linked to. This information can be read or deleted, provided you know the passwords, and provided you're standing at the portal when you attempt to access the information. Frog keeps his deletion password unknown, thus, agents who use his portal can never delete their coordinates. However, he never checks these coordinates either, much in the same way he's always forgetting to lock his door.** I'm guessing Draconik managed to read Mr Frog's coordinates. It's the only way to explain his post that I can think of, and if it's what he did, there were a lot of missing details.
- **Portal consoles can be activated by remote control, provided you're standing in the same universe.** This is necessary for the next law.
- **Mr Frog previously invented a device (a "portal bracelet") that can create a wormhole back to the last portal console it was attached to, and activate it the same way as a remote control would, making the miniportal create a portal near the bracelet's coordinates. Mr Frog is the only one who has this technology,** though I suppose that can change if deemed necessary... At the moment, **bracelets only work with Mr Frog's portal console,** as he's modified it. This bracelet circumvents the following problem by using interdimensional triangulation.
- **You can't simply call up a friend in another dimension and say, "Hey, can you send me a portal to pick me up? I'm at 302093.399392, 2034991.33300, -993384.33,39944,-183857,10038."** You have to go to a predesignated zone and tell your friend to activate a portal there. I'm guessing this is because you can't possibly figure out your own coordinates. Good example: Do you know what your current coordinates are relative to the center of the universe?
- **It's possible to establish a portal directly into another portal, like in Stargate. However, most people just don't bother. Megaportals "attract" incoming wormholes, so that it's more likely they'll land there instead of somewhere else.**

This fixes **ALL** the myriads of plot holes and apparent continuity snarls involving wormholes. I doubt anybody will break them, as none of the above have been broken so far, but I want to get them up just to make sure.
The continuity snarl has been struck down!

SPLINT:

15th Galena, 207._

That abnormally tall girl named rose kept insisting she be given a weapon of some kind, and has been smacking me in the back of the head every time we pass. So I've had her a room dug and given her a shield and a pitchblende hammer. Talvieno decided to throw a party. Said something about hearing I ordered cavies from home for her.

17th Galena, 207.

Took a few days to moves the bins laden with piles upon piles of shit we wanted to be rid of. These boys will be making quite the handsome profit, if they get out alive. I'm not very confident in that, knowing our luck.



The merchants are also now within the walls. They Chose to use-

An ambush! Curse them!

No! Not now! Why now!? I heard cries of spawn attacking! WE DO NOT NEED MORE SHIT!!!! 2nd Squad's closest, they'll have to thin them out!



One of the guards struck first according to the reports, knocking the lead spawn on its face. Someone forgot to unlock the front door to the barracks, but thankfully Paintbrush had the sense to do so before charging out with James and Hakah, the rest moving through the main fortress (or going for their gear.)

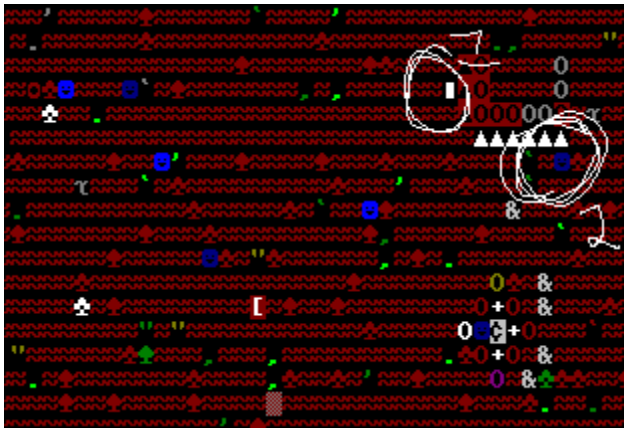
Paintbrush said James made contact first, cleaving the upper body down to the liver, though the beast laughed at such a feeble, to it anyway, display of hostility. Apparently the leader was quite strong, or had a thick neck. it was struck in the head several times by both man and dwarf. Also James felt the need to try and take a chunk out of it for no real reason.

Overall, it got to be quite the mess. Another ambush party tried to jump in, and went down as well. Hakah was bitten, but thankfully it was just a nasty bruise on his face. He also receives a broken arm, but for some reason he was managing to wield two shields and two axes. Looks like he'll be getting a copper heart. Evidently to him, getting one of his arms broken was just a minor inconvenience.

'Hakah' Stâkudokol has been quite content lately. He sustained minor injuries recently.
[Yeah. that was his idea of a minor injury. He got his arm busted, and to him it was minor. I think his idea of a major injury is only the ones that kill you instantly.]

According to Fischer, with his arm broken and great agony pretty obvious on his face, he dealt the killing blow to the final three spawn of the first ambush. He promptly passed out.

Oh, and a mason seemed pretty oblivious to the danger, and kept working in spite of the horrors that wanted to rip his face off.



[1. The white block is the mason, still working. 2. that's paintbrush, who just oneshotted a spawn after bowling it over.] According to Paintbrushturkey, who led the counter attack, several even attempted a retreat once their leader was killed. That's a touch unusual for the spawn... They can't be getting smarter can they?



[Yep. They actually tried to retreat and got chopped to ribbons for their trouble. Axes definitely make fighting spawn too easy. Gonna move 2nd Squad into the depot barracks and 1st to the iron one.]

After the ruckus had passed, the report was amazingly only some stitches being needed for some of the human soldiers from claw induced injuries and Hakah's broken arm. I have since ordered construction of the Fist to resume.

[[Talvieno's note: Splint had decided to make a fist rising from the ground with a raised middle finger during his second term.]]

17th Galena, 207.

The voices made themselves known again while I was practicing with my hammer. They told me to move the fist, and so I have.

19th Galena, 207.

Since Simon was on break I had a guardsdwarf named Granite (she evidently has a love of the stone. Lucky her, we have tons of it.) Bought basically every damned bit of food they had. I'm sick of plump helmets. Plus I'm positive Mr Frog adds chemicals to random ones when no-ones in the food stockpiles.

The humans brought many valuable metals, including rose gold, platinum, iron, and silver. I think I'll request more of these metals, and some black bronze if they have any. Just in case. Mixed in with the booze they brought, was golden blaze and sunshine, so a few dwarves with a preference to the drinks will be happy.

Evidently Granite was very generous according to the Guild Rep. Good. It helps put

us on good terms with our surface dwelling allies, and it gets rid of some of the piles upon piles of shit.

21st Galena, 207.

In celebration of our victory, a party was held, and I decided to attend. The guild rep can wait, since I haven't spoken with some of my friends in some time. Several scouts of the spawn were also seen, one of them swarmed by the caravanners. Aside from an injured dog nothing bad actually came of it.

The fist is also coming along nicely, and the barrels we purchased instantly found use for brining in the vast quantity of food we purchased. The fist's foundations, along with two floors, are finished. I'm honestly impressed. I've decided to have the fingers alternate between iron and gold should our supplies permit.

Talvi should be quite happy as well. The humans brought a cavy with them, which has since been purchased.

EDIT: The freaking game ninja'd me with a necromancer. They're still stupid, even by DF standards. Were the countless others not a good enough hint that necros will find no fun times here?

(Soulslicerjames): As far as magic goes, my dwarf seems eager to learn the trick of killing the spawn. The spawn retreating though? More and more evidence of my analysis being right. Perhaps someone found some way to control the spawn and hijacked their introduction to Everoc? I don't know, but I cannot think of any explanation that DOESN'T lead to scarier hypothesizes.

(Splint): honestly I was shocked to see them retreat (or try to anyway.) That's not behavior I've ever seen anything but their scouts show. Also I realized why my fist is coming along so well. We have a *lot* of furnace operators, and that's under metalworking allowing them to take part in constructions needing metal.

(Corai): I thought [CRAZED] or [LIKES_FIGHTING] kept them from fleeing? Or [NO_FEAR]

(Hanslanda): That's why I was freaked out a little it; three of them actually turned tail and tried to flee the field. They didn't get far. Paintbrush and James ran them down.

(Talvieno): The **Spawn** *ran away* from **our dwarves**. What unholy circle of hell have we descended to? *What have we become?!*

(Corai): We ARE the spawn. The spawn are actually the dwarves of Spearbreakers trying to reclaim their homes.

(Splint): He who fights monsters becomes one himself..... Mother of god.

(Soulslicerjames): Now all I need is a full set of spawn-bone armor. That ought to strike fear into the hearts of my enemies. I wanted it noted however, that the quote

of how Spearbreakers actively defying attempts to enforce order was wrong in the scope of the problem. IT IS ACTIVELY CREATING EVIDENCE FOR MY THEORIES OF JUST HOW THINGS WILL GET WORSE!

(Splint): We're becoming a whole different brand of monsters here ladies and gentlemen. We're making the very abominations we feared fear us.

(Hanslanda): Spearbreakers: Where the only logical explanation is that we are the ravaging, world-ending plague of monstrosities.

DRACONIK_SANKIS:

The Plot Thickens

Draconik sat on a nearby ledge as he watched the battle below and sipped his blood-wine; all in all it gave him good insight into how useful axes were versus the spawn. And he watched as a mason ignored a spawn being punted by a hammer dwarf, and he watched the spawn flee in panic from the.... Draconik nearly fell from the ledge as he whipped back to see the Fleeing spawn being mowed down but he saw it... The Spawn had learned fear... Gathering his materials he raced back to his lab collected his notes, and checked them, three, four six times none of it made sense the Spawn don't flee, they don't know fear so how....

He looked back down the darkened passageways that led to the fortress proper. "What have you created here Mr Frog," he asked to only the darkness, and then ideas began to stream into his mind, he gathered up a few more notes this time on biomass and he had it. The perfect way to deal with the spawn, even if it meant releasing the plague upon this world again Draconik had the method to create a spawn fighting weapon; he even had all the parts. As he gathered up the nearby materials, he slowly lifted one of the obsidian hearts and set it onto the reprogrammed Bio-Mass which consumed it with vigor, then he removed a hypodermic needle and withdrew a sample of his own blood, a sample of a motley collection of old bio-weapons, neurotoxins and dormant viruses, including one of the two samples of HV-1 in Parasol's entire Bio-weapons Division, the one virus that had united this world in its recent past. Injecting the Bio-mass with his Blood allowed it to process and replicate the Viruses, he then sent a decrypted message to Lab Six.

He knew Mr Frog and anyone else who had any means of monitoring messages sent through portals would get this message, in fact he wanted them to, no sense in having everyone at risk of death if he failed to properly maintain control over this experiment, and Parasol needed to be ready to hit the reset again if he did fail.

Priority One Message to Lab Six, Classification Urgent, Encryption: None.

To All Concerned,

I have figured out a way to effectively combat HS-X as indeed it has grown from original HS-1/1a and 2 deviants. However it requires setting Bio-Mass agent to Living Organic as the Spawn are no-longer undead sub-beings but fully alive *notes included here*. It also calls for setting Bio-mass Culture into a Node and infecting it with the HV-1 Virus. I recommend a Level three recall of ALL personnel aside from

myself. Have the Reset ready in case I fail, or if the project is too successful.

Draconik Sankis, former Head of Bio-weapons Department

Afterwards:

After Draconik had sent his messages to began to gather up supplies, he'd need more of the obsidian hearts for this too work as well as DNA samples from a few key dwarves, and he needed to develop a few more skill sets for this to work.

SPLINT:

[The following is a Ballpoint Tech analysis of Sewaturet]

Intelligence Group 1 database access: Processing request, Stand by....
Access Granted. Welcome to G1 Internal Database Commander Arkur.

Accessing database: Threat Analysis. Stand By...

Threat Analysis and other data on city/defenses: Sewaturet. Connecting to database.
Stand by...

Connection complete.

Sewaturet, Thiefcrushers.

Current standing: Metropolis, Free-City (Otherwise known as a "City-State.")

Political Importance: Global Coalition Capital.

Strategic Importance: Controls all major land supply routes in the north east section of the continent.

Population: 675,389 and growing.

Gathering Demographic information, stand by...

Demographic data retrieved.

Human (Homo Sapiens): 47% Population composition.

Human (Homo carbonum corium*): 13% Population composition.

Dwarf (Homo Lapis*): 10% Population Composition.

Elf (Homo siluae*): 4% Population Composition

Pony (Equum cogitatio*): 10% Population Composition.

Goblin (Homo odium*): 6% Population composition.

Scythod (Insectorum caeli*) 5% Population Composition.

Manamaid (Trichechus Manatus Sapiens): 3% Population Composition.

Other sapients compose 2% Population composition.

Population known to be naturally disposed to violent action against any perceived threat.

Leadership composed almost solely of Humans (Homo sapiens) with Dwarven and Equus Advisors.

Weapon-Vehicle composition:

City Defense forces have not updated weapon systems to extant magnetic accelerator type weaponry. Resupply from enemy forces will not be feasible.

MAJOR THREAT: City defense forces comprise largely of humans (Homo Sapiens) with other races as a minority. BEWARE MANAMAID SOLDIERS. THEY SHOULD BE ELIMINATED AT RANGE.

MAJOR THREAT: City defense forces known to have large number of self-propelled artillery.

Minor threat: Enemy forces possess large numbers of light attack aircraft. However these vehicles will be woefully underpowered compared to Company Airpower, due to their nature as light transports for small groups of soldiers.

Enemy weapons consist of late industrial era propellant driven weaponry, with directed energy weapons appearing in the possession of Scythod militia and soldiers from time to time. Main threat posed by these weapons is projectile fragmentation and indirect fire weaponry, which extant Mag-cel systems cannot replicate.

Enemy lacks extant emplaced and self-propelled anti-air weapons, however man-portable systems with tracking capability are common and present a major threat to company airpower.

Force composition

3000 regular army personnel
6000 Self-Defense Army personnel (Primary enemy force)
6000 Emergency Response Combat Personnel (militia forces)
8000 Noncombatant support staff

Despite man-portable AA systems, Direct aerial assault is recommended operation procedure should Operation Iron Curtain be enacted.

Consideration: Stone INC has many assets in the city and may send Company Contractors to protect them, effectively bolstering city defenses.

Consideration: Sewaturet has a Mutual Defense Treaty with The Kingdom of Harlech near Company HQ. Should a call for assistance be made by the city, Harlech forces may assault the company's In-dimension headquarters.

Consideration: Parasol Employed Contractors may assault the city. If city walls are breached, expect Parasol opposition.

Consideration: Eris has recently begun supplying factions with aggressive and militant intent. Eris may be using these forces to further its own ends. Should city walls be breached expect irregular opposition.

Recommendation: Eliminate or sabotage communications prior to assault.

Connection closed to G1 Database: Threat Analysis.
Connection closed to G1 Database.

Have a good day Commander Arkur.

*

The names translate respectively

Homo carbonum corium: Man of Coal Hide, otherwise called mountain barbarians.

Because of their ancestry they are considered humans by Ballpoint.

Homo siluae: Man of Forest/ Forest dwelling man, Elves.

Homo Lapis: Man of Stone, Dwarves.

Homo odium: Man of Hate, Goblins.

Equum cogitatio: Horse of Thought, Ponies. Sometimes called Equus Sapiens or more disparagingly as just Equus

Insectorum caeli: Insect of Heaven, Scythod. Refers to their extraterrestrial origin.

Manamaid's scientific name is taken from the West Indian manatee, essentially meaning that it is a far more intelligent relative, though this is false and based solely off their similarities of appearance.

[[Talvieno's note: In the conversations following this, a huge argument began as to just how the chronology works. Everyone had thought that all the continuity snarls had been worked out, but this was proven wrong, and resulted in more than one person getting offended. Interestingly, during this heated argument, no obscene language was used, and the worst insult was "obtuse". I'm snipping it so you don't have to read it.]]

(TALVIENO):

I'm going to attempt to ignore a logical chain of events and see what *might* have happened, given what we have now.

1. Boatmurdered, Headshoots, Syrupleaf
2. Parasol goes back in time and puts Syrupleaf in stasis to appease Armok and save the world for absolutely no reason whatsoever. Then, for some bizarre, inexplicable reason, they sit around and do absolutely nothing but twiddle their thumbs for over a hundred years.
3. Ballpoint arrives and gets to the Holistic Spawn first. Mr Frog takes it, modifies it, and releases it into the world as a test. Then he stumbles into the wrong room and gets himself locked in a cryogenic storage device for the next two hundred years (think carbonite). When he emerges, he promptly gets his ass fired, suffering severe sporadic amnesia at the same time. Or perhaps he overdosed and toasted his nut with a memory wiper do-gadget.
4. Ballpoint continues to monitor the experiment, and Parasol gets a whiff of what's going on. Instead of using their vastly superior technology to create a virus to eradicate the spawn threat, over the course of whatever's left of

- those two hundred years they take Ballpoint's version of the Spawn instead of modifying their own uncontaminated samples of the species. Then for some bizarre reason they release them.
5. In an uncharacteristic fit of illogicality and suicidal remorse (possibly due to brain trauma from the freezing process) (or another overdose), Mr Frog travels to Spearbreakers.
 6. By the time Mr Frog arrives at Spearbreakers, Parasol has already stopped twiddling their thumbs and decided that the experiment is theirs, and not Ballpoint's. Ballpoint doesn't really care either way, but they'd like to see why Parasol's recently-released version of the Spawn are tougher than theirs - which is what they'd wanted in the first place.
 7. Thus begins the great timewar, where Parasol both tries to destroy Ballpoint and protect "their" experiment, contrary to their purely academic nature. Ballpoint, on the other hand, just wants their Spawn buddies back so they can run more tests.
 8. Spearbreakers is located either on, or near, a thing. This thing does the other thing, that, you know, gets more spawn stuff to appear from nowhere. Stuff. Thing. Thingy stuff. Basically there's more Spawn, and bigger, at Spearbreakers than anywhere else. Thus, it's the central location of the timewar.
 9. As a result of being at the epicenter, secretive agents are sent into Spearbreakers to try to tip the scales. Contrary to what you'd believe with Ballpoint's military and espionage, it's Parasol who sends the majority of these.
 10. Eris shows up and decides to put an end to both of them through subtle manipulation. Joseph discovers Mr Frog, goes "Hah, what luck" and takes him on board. At the same time, he believes Vanya - basically a passerby, but she knows too much - is dead. Also at the same time, Urist saves the fortress (and by extension, the timewar (and by extension, the entire universe from Armok's wrath)) from a rogue agent (predictably, from Parasol). Armok assists him in this.
 11. Enter Rose (origin indeterminate) and Draconik. Draconik, ironically, is yet another Parasol agent, but who cares. Parasol is good with agents. I guess Ballpoint's strategy is to stumble blindly into combat without sending anybody in to scout things out. Perhaps they, like Draigean, value the element of surprise. "SURPRISE!" (By the way, nobody take Kannan. I've already planned him as a Ballpoint spy for over a month now, but I was going to leave that as a surprise. Whoops, spoilers.)

This ***appears*** to work, from a story standpoint. Logic standpoint, no.

(Mr Frog): *We apologize for the technical difficulties and now return you to your regularly-scheduled meta-clusterfuck.*

(SPLINT):

[[Talvieno's note: The conversation changed to mods for Spearbreakers II.]]

- baseline spawn: What we fight now, but more resistant to cutting weapons.
- Macrospawn: A vastly larger spawn. Still has some concept of group cohesion.
- Spawnlords: Powerful fire spitting Spawn.

Flying ones.. no. because then they'll be able to circumvent damn near ANY defensive measure which,. as strange as it sounds, would be a game breaker.

Noncastes

Roving Spawn: Packs of spawn that are just roaming about killing and eating whatever they run into.

Megaspawn: Bronze Colossi size spawn that roam about alone smashing shit for fun.

(SOULSLICERJAMES):

LIST OF POSSIBLE SPAWN TYPES

please note that this was originally conceived as a unique race, and I won't bother changing details that won't work for spawn of hollistic.

Splint, Talvieno, and Mr Frog, as the ones who created the spawn used in the first place, feel free to alter anything because of the above. Or maybe split into their own race as I originally envisioned, if you feel such is worthwhile.

Spawn(base): Does not actually exist, only used for comparing each variant.
Compared to dwarves, have slightly above-average strength and toughness, and equal dexterity. Size of a human, but with four arms, and sharp claws and teeth.

Workspawn: Slightly below average in all stats, but are the ones that do all the non-military jobs. Never show up in fort mode, but will engage in self-defence.

Darkspawn: Slightly smaller, weaker, and more fragile, but slightly more dextrous. Adept at sneaking and have trap-avoid. May show up as thieves or in ambushes.

Waterspawn: Amphibious, but otherwise basic spawn. Show up as specialist troops.

Venomspawn: Otherwise basic spawn with poisoned claws and teeth. Poison causes extreme pain, with a delayed effect of gradual reduction of physical stats. Show up as specialist troops.

Warspawn: Slightly stronger and tougher, can wield weapons and enter martial trances. Main warriors and may lead ambushes.

Deathspawn: Very strong and tough, but somewhat less agile. Noticeably larger than others, prone to rage, and are building destroyers. Heavy support and shock troops.

Spawnlords: Leaders of the spawn. Taller, stronger, tougher and more agile than base spawn. Have trap-avoid and building destroyer. Two arms may wield weapons, and may enter martial trances. Only show up leading sieges.

MR FROG:

Perky Receptionist: Recriminations

Mr Frog stared at the Spawn tissue sample in the tray sullenly. He'd recently devised a way to toughen the Spawn's tissues and quadruple their resistance to piercing or cutting weapons with few negative drawbacks and was now in the process of figuring out how to discretely [add] a drawback. The constant surveillance in his lab meant Mr Frog had to at least be working on [something] at all times, though to Mr Frog's benefit the idiots in the security room probably couldn't visually discern the difference between engineering a bioweapon and baking a soufflé. Silena stood next to him watching, not doing anything particularly-helpful but at the very least ready and willing to spring into action the second Mr Frog needed her to hold something for a moment.

Silena, for her part, wasn't as thrilled with the prospect of assisting Mr Frog with his horrific project as she preferred to let on, but she was under orders to assist him, and so assist him she would. Admittedly, the only help Mr Frog would allow her to provide was holding onto things when he needed a free hand and cleaning up the occasional noxious spill, and even that had been a hard-earned privilege only obtained after a 15-minute war with shouting, screaming, and at one point biting (Mr Frog was absurdly-secretive about the project, not allowing Silena to so much as look at anything remotely-important -- a fact which Silena noted with a healthy amount of suspicion), but that was as involved as Silena wished to become.

Something had occurred to Silena recently; Mr Frog was Ballpoint -- or, at least, ex-Ballpoint. In fact, ex-Ballpoint was even better; he had no reason to try to protect the company. Silena wasn't sure how much Mr Frog could be trusted, but she was reasonably-certain that any questions regarding Ballpoint would be answered truthfully, and there was something that she desperately needed to know. Perhaps Mr Frog would give her the answers she'd been searching for fourteen years.

"Mr Frog, sir?" she began uncertainly. The little man turned his attention away from his work and craned his head around and up at her, irritation on his face. His attention was enough; Silena continued: "You were fairly high-up at Ballpoint, correct?"

Mr Frog's expression darkened. He looked at Silena suspiciously; her expression was uncharacteristically-serious. "Yes. What of it?" he said; "I've cut my ties with the company, if that's what you're concerned about," he continued tensely; "I want nothing more than to see it burn."

Silena shook her head; "No, that's not it," she said. There were other things about Mr Frog that made her suspicious.

"My father was an engineer for Ballpoint," said Silena; Mr Frog raised his eyebrows. Silena continued: "Fourteen years ago, he vanished without a trace. We tried everything -- police, private detectives -- but nobody could find even a single clue." Silena felt tears welling up; this was dredging up painful memories. "My mother suspected Ballpoint," continued Silena; "She didn't have any proof, but she felt it in her gut. Me too." Mr Frog straightened up and turned towards Silena, now

paying full attention. "She tried to track him down on her own," continued Silena, her voice cracking, "sneaking into Ballpoint's facilities and looking for clues, but then she vanished, too." Silena paused and took a deep breath, composing herself; she looked Mr Frog straight in the eyes. "Do you know what happened to them? Either of them?"

Mr Frog furrowed his brow; this conversation was very telling. He supposed there wasn't any harm in humouring her. "I don't believe I've even heard of either of them, unfortunately," he said; "I recall a few of your species working at Ballpoint, but as far as I could tell they were all female, and if your mother had had a run-in with security I wouldn't have heard of it." He sucked on his lip; come to think of it, he strongly-doubted that Silena was actually related to any of the hominid species, despite superficial similarities. He added: "Unless... is your species not sexually-dimorphic? Perhaps even hermaphroditic? What did your father look like?" There was a distinct possibility that he had met her father and mistook him for a woman.

Silena's eyes widened for a moment, then she shook her head. "It's a lot more complicated than that," she said quickly; "My father was a dwarf. His name was Zuntir. He was a few inches shorter than you, stocky, and had black hair, blue eyes, and a really big nose with a bit of a hook to it. He usually had a pointed beard a bit like yours, but longer."

Mr Frog thought about this; interspecies couples weren't unheard-of. Silena could easily have been adopted, or her parents could have used a sperm donor. In any case, he didn't recall ever knowing anyone by that name; however, the date Silena had given for his disappearance raised another, highly-unsettling possibility. It was when Ballpoint's experimentation with the Spawn was hitting its peak; some of Ballpoint's dwarven staff had started to object very strongly, and said dwarves developed a disturbing tendency to vanish.

Mr Frog frowned gravely. Silena's heart dropped into her stomach; she couldn't imagine what it took to upset a monster like Mr Frog.

"I don't recall ever meeting anyone by your father's description," began Mr Frog; Silena's hopes shattered. "However," he continued, his eyes suddenly hooded, "at the time your father disappeared, Ballpoint had hit the height of its Spawn research." Silena's eyes widened; she had a hunch where this was going, and she didn't like it. "The nature of the experiments caused a great deal of consternation among the dwarven staff, which many of them -- against their better judgment -- voiced, some of them threatening to go to the authorities," continued Mr Frog gravely; "Such dwarves typically vanished shortly afterwards." He focused his gaze at Silena; "Before he vanished, did your father express any sort of displeasure with Ballpoint?"

Silena shook her head. Tears were streaming down her face. "No," she said; "He... kept his work private. He never talked about his job in front of me and Mom. When he -- when he was with his family, his family was all that m-mattered." Silena was breaking down; she took several deep breaths and continued: "But what you're saying makes sense. So you think... you think Ballpoint killed him to keep him quiet?"

Mr Frog averted his gaze. "Do I think they killed him..?" he muttered darkly; "Yes, in a sense." Silena's insides froze; she didn't like Mr Frog's tone one little bit. "Ballpoint's management is very pragmatic about these things, you understand," said Mr Frog grimly; "If something doesn't work anymore, they repair it. If it can't be repaired, they repurpose it." He hesitantly looked Silena in the eye. "I believe that your father was used as a live test subject for Ballpoint's Spawn experiments," said Mr Frog; he had been in charge of the project, and had likely watched with detached interest as Zuntir turned into a Spawn, not even knowing his name. "I am deeply, deeply sorry," said Mr Frog. He looked at Silena with a sincerity in his eyes that shocked her, if only because of who it was coming from.

Silena's mind went reeling, and not just because Mr Frog actually seemed to be truly-remorseful about something. She felt light-headed, and placed her hand on a nearby desk to steady herself. Had that truly been her father's fate? She didn't want to believe it, but it made too much sense to dismiss. She waited a few moments for her head to stop spinning, then looked back at Mr Frog. "And my mother..?" she asked.

Mr Frog shook his head, his expression hardening back to its usual steady, dead-eyed leer. "I wouldn't know," he said; "However, if security caught her somewhere she wasn't supposed to be and upmanage suspected that she had something she would go to the authorities with, they would probably have either killed her or -- more-likely, based on what I've seen -- wiped her memories and dumped her in some primitive universe with no means of returning." He paused, then added: "Is that why you joined Eris, then? To take revenge on Ballpoint?"

Silena nodded, her expression darkening. "Yes," she said hotly; "I hate them. For what they did to my family, I want to watch every single bastard who ever worked there die." She raised her voice angrily; "If I could, I'd kill them all myself! After everything they've done, it's what they deserve!"

Mr Frog raised an eyebrow coolly. "Really? Every single bastard who ever worked there?" he asked pointedly; "I find that statement highly-alarming. I don't have much to work with here -- regulations, you see -- so if you were to try to break into my bedroom while I'm sleeping, I can't guarantee that your death would be as prompt as I would like."

Silena shook her head. She knew Mr Frog had been head of Ballpoint's bioengineering division, and had likely watched with his characteristic cold, mask-like sneer as her father turned. "No," she said darkly; "I think you should die for what you did -- I want to make you suffer like your test subjects had -- but you're on my side now." She glared at Mr Frog; "I can't forgive you, though, especially now that I know what might have happened to my father -- what you might have done to him."

Mr Frog raised his eyebrow again; seeing the usually-bubbly woman wish him dead to his face was oddly-amusing to him. It almost felt like a perverse sort of accomplishment. "Hate me if you like," he said coldly; "I'm not proud of what I did at Ballpoint. But I do recommend that you prioritize punishing those that are still actively attempting to cause harm." He shrugged; "Sometimes working to correct the negative consequence of one's wrongdoings is punishment enough. Something, perhaps, to contemplate while doing those silly stretches of yours every morning." Silena continued to glare at Mr Frog, unsure how to respond.

Mr Frog turned his attention back to the tissue sample. "In any case, I'm deeply-sorry about your parents, but I have work to attend to at the moment." It seemed to Mr Frog that he had finally seen Silena's true nature. He still had his doubts as to her intelligence, but there was clearly a very angry woman hidden beneath her cheerful, ditzy mask; there was a slight possibility that he could channel that anger to his advantage.

(SPLINT):

Planned weapons, some of them already made:

Railguns - The ones the dwarves will have will trade rate of fire seen in the stories to devastating power.

Chainswords----|

Buzzhammers--|

Chainaxes-----| All of these are self explanatory (they run off Chainsaw Good basically.)

Sawpikes-----|

Mughammers - Massive spiked mugs on the end of a sturdy pole.

Mug Rifles - Actually more of an air gun that fires mugs.

Gladius for shits and giggles

Fist saw - basically half of a small serrated disc on a handle.

Mug - Yup. An actual mug as a small bludgeoning weapon.

Nightsticks - Intended to be wooden billy clubs for the fortress guard but macedwarves will find metal ones a good stand in for a proper mace.

Almost forgot the Grindaxe, an axe made of a bunch of mechanisms and does what it says. grinds against the target, tearing away bits. Exlcuding the chainweapons this is probably one of the most visceral weapons cause it yanks and tears rather than cutting or slicing.

[[Talvieno's note: He forgot the serrated disc launcher.]]

(TALVIENO):

83,26,92, r0, z0
FPS: 14.73
Map Read Time: 21ms
Map Beautification Time: 41ms
Draw: 69ms
D1: 1
1/1/207, 2:15
0 Sprites drawn, 0 tiles drawn, -1.\$ sprites per tile.

Block 0x0
Coord:(51,51,0)



SPLINT:

25th Galena, 207.

Seems a few of Stausic's masterpieces were lost during the cleanup. I thought he'd brush it off, but it seems.... Well...

Stausic Amecshibbi, jeweler, has been found dead, head stuffed in a magma smelter. *[Yeah I added the head in smelter bit. I don't know how else he could have died.]*

No-Hair saw him stuff his head into one of the smelters in the forge works. Had a bucket brigade put him out so we won't need to worry too much about his ghost. Also had to cut the party short. *[Undesignated the dining room then redesignated]* Needed to get that food inside and with some of us at the party we weren't really helping much with that. I had had to repurpose some of the old quarry on the living level to hold food we bought.

26th Galena, 207.

I've begun my meeting with the human representative. More surface booze and fish are in order.

Shethbah Cikodas: On behalf of the Merchants' Guild, let me extend greetings to your people. There is much to discuss.

28th Galena, 207.

Another necromancer failed his manhood test. Suffered a slight case of head trauma from Hans' shield.

6th Limestone, 207.

Crusher started pitching a fit. Evidently someone sold his shoes and pants while he was getting changed for training. He'll probably get a hammering if anyone gets hurt... Oh and another necromancer. This one had the great fun of running into Fischer and Jack Magnus. It didn't end well.

[I forgot to assign the bodyguard detail full uniforms, though Crusher's clothes really did get sold for some reason (probably left unattended too long.) Crusher kept pitching a fit and someone has a nicer room than the baron, so I had to up the value to avoid retarded tantruming from the ingame dorf.]

10th Limestone, 207.

I had to go with sub-par materials for the fist itself, as we finally began running out of Iron bars. Guess we'll just have to find another magnetite cluster and make more is all. Also had an order put out for shoes, pants, and shirts, if only to help everyone stay clothed and keep the rest of my guards from pitching a fit.

14th Limestone, 207.

Put in a request for leather and cloth, tons of drinks and a lot of meat and fish from the humans. Black bronze, iron and a little platinum as well. It'll be expensive, but will all the junk we have laying around we should be more than able to afford it.

16th Limestone, 207. Intermittent entry.

Just getting used to the weight of this monster of a hammer is challenging. Crusher, Thumper, and even Rose seem to be more accustomed to using these weapons than me. Guess that's what I get for being a desk jockey for the better part of 12 years.

19th Limestone, 207.

Migrants arrived, and I've decided to arrange a welcome party, partly as also to recognize the groups from earlier who made it in as well.

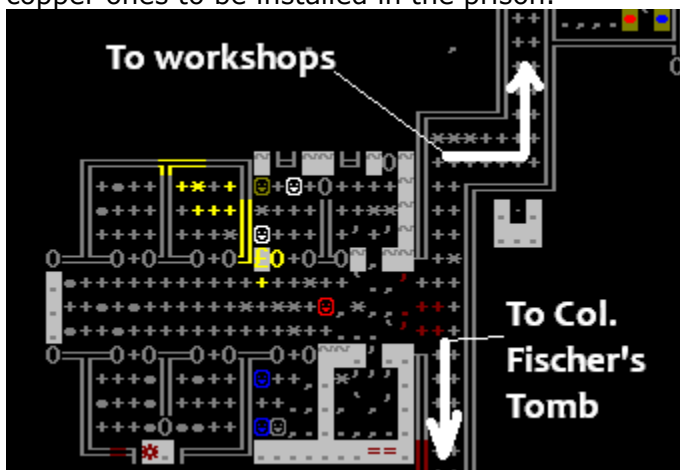
Some migrants have arrived.

25th Limestone, 207.

I've laid the foundation for a project Talvi thought of, a giant hand clawing up from the blood plain as a monument to the war against the undead. I am also establishing a surface farm with a small watchtower, to make use of all those surface seeds we have.



I also guess I should include a sketch of a prison being built near the shops and Fischer's tomb. It is currently being smoothed over by a few of the new arrivals and old hands. I've requested some gold doors be made for Fischer's resting place, and copper ones to be installed in the prison.



The fist will have to wait for the time being. Also...



Why the fuck is he down there? I'm sitting up he twiddling my beard waiting to finish our negotiations, and he's down by the wells jerking off or something. Bah. Fuck him; I'm gonna get a drink and some more mugs. I already broke four waiting for him.

[There we are, another short update. I had to take a breather, between the work overload earlier in the week I did and the general nastiness the other day. I'll try and get another one done in the next day or so, if not two.]

SUS:

From the journal of Sus III

It has been quite a while since I last had time to write a journal. Most of that time, I've been in and out of the hospital, drugged out of my senses. I also seem to recall, albeit faintly, that shifty Mr Frog character jamming needles full of his "experimental curatives" into my arm every now and then... Or maybe it was just a drug-addled hallucination or a fit of sobriety? I don't honestly know anymore...

Still, I think there is something seriously amiss in this fortress. Mostly the hospital; before Mitch rearranged the whole thing, it was but a glorified morgue where the dead and dying lay in their own filth, unattended for days on end. Now, there seems to be more active "care", though I use that word with the proverbial pebble of rock salt... Some of the things going on in that place have nothing to do with making the patients better, and some seem to have an outright opposite effect.

Speaking of Mr Frog, he has been acting strange lately, even for his usual, cryptic

self... He seems *different* somehow, as if he was unsure of who he was. I referred to a recent talk I had with him the other day, and he just gave me a blank stare like he'd forgotten all about it. He's also spending quite a lot of time with that strange vagrant girl and her friends, Urist and Hans I think they're called. Were I the suspicious type, I could swear there's something fishy going on with the four of them. As it is, however, I'm just glad to be back on my feet again, so I'll play it safe and just steer clear of any strange business...

What else? Oh, it's raining blood again, mountain barbarian blood to be specific. Smells like over-cooked bacon. Also, a couple of necromancer's apprentices have been giving us a bit of a bother, although nothing like the disaster that got my cousin, that blessed foolhardy dorf called Sus I Bibandeler, killed. Our military seems to be well on top of things for now. In other words, it's pretty much Tuesday for Spearbreakers. Oh, and a human caravan made it through, that certainly merits a mention. They brought a nice selection of drinks, though I myself find human beverages a bit watery to my liking.

P.S. Splint held a big party to honour the heroes that finally ended the undead menace. He made a big speech too, saying he would draw up plans for a great monument of some kind, to "celebrate the undying Dwarven spirit", I recall he said. I kind of agree; after surviving so long in this hellish place, we're at least entitled to some sort of display of our pride. I guess those lurking Necromancers and Spawn ambushes will keep making trouble to any construction crews topside, though...

SPLINT:

26th Limestone, 207.

Stupid prick still hasn't shown up to finish our negotiations. Fischer killed a deer that a huntsman didn't bother to finish when he ran out of ammo, so we got a little home-killed venison now, which is good. I swear I keep hearing things as of late.... Maybe Stova's spirit is haunting my hammer or something.

The prison construction is progressing smoothly and the doors for Fischer's tomb are done. She'll rest like a royal when that terrible day comes.

There seems to be some architectural glitch for the surface farm so I'm having the stairs dismantled and a ramp put up instead. And I'm still sitting here with my thumb stuck up my ass until that damned merchant representative sees fit to drag his lazy ass up here.

6th Sandstone, 207.

He finally stopped whacking off by the wells or whatever he was doing and met with me today. The prison is also nearing final completion with all the facilities the guard will need for training, and a small office to hold trials in so we don't have another fiasco like with the military liaison and Hans.

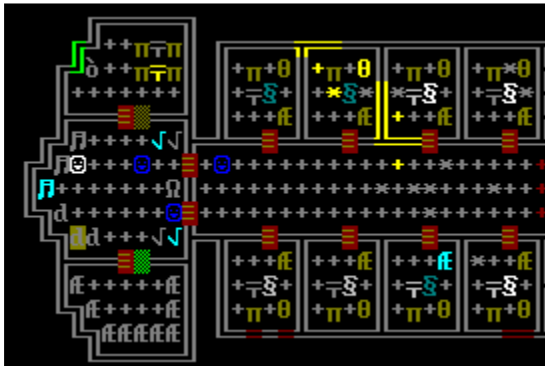
8th Sandstone, 207. Intermittent Entry.

Rose has been a touch out of line lately. As the diplomat is sleeping in the skulker barracks Rose decided to organize a rather harsh training regimen for myself and the

other bodyguards. Almost reminds me of Stova to be honest, but there's something... off about her. bah, maybe I'm just getting paranoid...

15th Sandstone, 207.

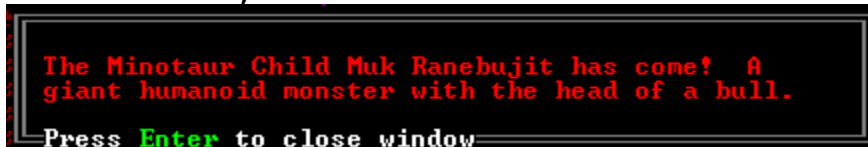
Prison's done. Each cell contains a bed, a place to eat, a restraint, and a place for personal effects should the imprisoned decide to bring them into the cell with them (Journals, spare clothes, sketchbooks and the like.) I've also had sets of bars on both ends installed on the corridor as a back-up measure and asked Mr Frog to install whatever security measures it is he's spread around the place in each cell as well.



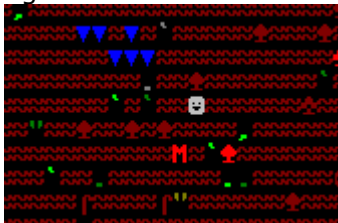
16th Sandstone, 207. Intermittent Entry.

This is embarrassing. Turns out the reason no-one got the farms made or the tower built was the door to them was locked. I feel a bit... Stupid for not asking if that was the problem.

17th Sandstone, 207.



The drumbeats sounded of a great beast arriving into our territory! A *minortaur* to be specific. Even as just a child it stands larger than any of us here. Fischer said she'd fight the beast alone. I have every bit of confidence in her.



[This was just as the battle was about to begin. Place your bets dwarfs and dwarfettes!]

She met the beast out on the hill, more or less in the middle of our blood plain. The stupid brute charged her and while it succeeded in knocking her over, it lost its balance and they tumbled over each other, with Fischer managing to get on top of it (I was watching from the bridged-tower.) She stabbed the bullman in the arm, a sickening crack being audible even up from the tower before the beast got up, only to be bitten twice by the Colonel and knocked over by her charge! I dare say she must be possessed by the spirits of the spawn she's slain as she was able to shake the beast about like a ragdoll after she bit it, the thing making one pitiful cry before

it passed out. She then rammed her pike into it's head multiple times before the beast breathed no more.

Afterwards I saw her tear the fell beat's head off, spit it on her pike and raise it triumphantly over herself and let out a cry of victory to all of us watching from the tower. We have since mounted said head, after having Mr Frog cure it so it wouldn't rot, in the main dining hall.

20th Sandstone, 207.

Agreement's been brokered and the merchants are still packing in to head off. We did dump quite a bit on them, as it's taking a long time for them to actually finish. The diplomat bid us farewell and left on good terms. My hammer seems pleased by this.

Trade Agreement with Gugiromon		
Good	Price	Priority
piques	162%	-10!-
tools	210%	---10
thread	134%	10!-
fish	183%	--10!
musical instruments	163%	-10!-
toys	126%	10!-
splints	204%	---10
meat	210%	---10
quivers	164%	-10!-
cloth	162%	-10!-
anvils	134%	10!-
according to the diplomat, the barbarians have been increasing thier raids of Gugiromon's coastal settlements. as such, they've requested a sizable amount of war material, ranging from medical supplies to anvils. I told him we couldn't supply thier campaign with food, to which he replied that "We could always use mugs. They make great catapult ammo." he insulted our mugs. fuck him, he just wishes his people made finer mugs than us!		

Shethbah Cikodas: Again on behalf of the Merchants' Guild, let me bid farewell to you and your stout dwarves.

25th Sandstone, 207.

Surface farm is built and walled in. Other than the minotaur, nothing eventful really happened as of late. I'm sure the spawn, barbarians, or goblins will have something to say about that when the home caravan arrives.

DRACONIK_SANKIS:

The Betrayal

Draconik sat in his dump-side laboratory watching the data as the Bio-mass absorbed the Spawn heart and Draconik's DNA code. As one series of lines gave way to another, Draconik flew from his chair, grabbing the figure who had just leapt at him and pinned the dwarf up against the ceiling, cracking more than a few of the dwarves ribs as the poisoned dagger fell to the ground. Draconik looked at the dwarf and recognized the dwarf as one of the medical staff, one of Parasol's agents. "What is the meaning of this Betrayal?" Draconik asked barely keeping his temper in check. "You're the one who betrayed ME!" the dwarf replied, spitting pure rage,

"You're nothing but a vampire and you're going to bring down this entire world." the Dwarf nearly screamed, as he tried to worm his way from Draconik's tightening grip. "First off while I have the Disease, and yes I take full responsibility for the outbreak upon this world, it was the computer code that chooses random employees' DNA codes for World-regeneration which pulled MY DNA, leading to that result. Second you just tried to kill a former Department Head and your a mid-grade assassin, you just don't randomly decide to kill people, so who ordered you?" Draconik demanded, cracking more ribs and one of the dwarves' arms. "WHO!" Draconik Bellowed. "Joseph, Joseph ordered your assassination, your getting too..." the Dwarf cried, before a tiny pop sounded and blood ran out his facial openings, as a tiny neural bomb liquefied the dwarves' brain. Draconik snarled at having important information denied to him, as he let the corpse down he did a complete search finding nothing of importance except a leather bound journal. As he read through it Draconik began to understand more and more and then the final truth hit him. The Only Person he could truly trust, was the one person he'd been trying to avoid. It was time to arrange a meeting with Mr Frog.

(Draconik_Sankis): This place makes Sparta look like preschool, and we had World War I and II for breakfast.

(TALVIENO):

just for fun.

Quote

This is Spearbreakers, which the dastardly devils shall not, from dawn to dusk, destroy.

Quote

Succession forts are all schizo, but this... this is Spearbreakers.

Quote

Cause THIS. IS. SPEARBREAKERS. AND WE FUCKING RUN OFF MUGS.

Quote

This is Spearbreakers. We have to live up to its name, see?

Quote

This is Spearbreakers; everything is the antonym of "under control"

Quote

I guess it would be worthwhile to point out that this is Spearbreakers... We don't have the time to pass the linking of the traps to the next player.

Quote

Well... This is Spearbreakers. The last outpost before hell. (or, possibly a suburb.)

Quote

This is Spearbreakers. We will use pikes and be expected to fail.

Quote

Excuse me? This is Spearbreakers, man.

Quote

This is Spearbreakers. I bet they're made of barbarian blood and mugs.

Quote

This is Spearbreakers, where all goddamn bets are off.

Quote

..Unless something weird and whacky is going on, having said that this is Spearbreakers, so everything is possible...

Quote

That would only be logical, but this is Spearbreakers, where logic dictates you must add a mug to all equations.

Quote

This is Spearbreakers, where all your base are belong to us. Because atomic mugs.

Quote

Then Mr Frog realized: this is Spearbreakers. Of course he's trying to make it harder.

TALVIENO:

Talvi's Journal, 21st of Sandstone

I've been *ever* so busy these past months an' all, I ain't e'en had time to make a journal post or nothin'. I's been hungry, too... Got forced to eat stuff from the kitchen again, I did. Draigneane's rooms got locked up tight for some dagnab reason - his rooms are near the Spawn an' all, and I couldn't my foot in worth a shoehorn's toe.

I know I'm forgettin' stuff I shouldn' be. Mr Frog - I watch him close - he keeps his room locked up tight all th' time now, and I ain't had no way t' get in thar' anymores. He closed down the lil' tunnel from my room to his - now why'd you suppose he'd go and do a thing like that fer? Makes no sense, I says for sure. Honest to goodness it don't. He's even been lockin his doors and nonsense. Mr Frog didn't used to *never* lock his doors, and I ain't got no clear idea why he's doin' it now. I cain't even get a good look at him half the time, 'less he's busy. Strange thing a'happened a couple'a days ago, tho'... Not sure how t'describe it an' all, but I think I'll do my right best, I will.

'Kay, see, Mr. Paintbrushturkey's a milit'ry man an' all, so he wanted a fuggle-ton of mugs an such for his army dwarves... I ain't rightly never seen no army as well decked out as him. I'm purty sure you could fill a pumpkin's hat with alla them if y'wanted, and I allus know how heavy my pumkins is. Now, just 'cause I ain't ever had a pumpkin of my own don't mean I doesn't know how much mine weigh, I can tell you that for sure. Anyhow... Paintbrushturkey said I weren't s'posed to make mechanisms no more, and I weren't supposed to cook, or chop trees an' stuff. He took my axe away... think it might have somethin' to do with how I attacked Mr Frog an' such... but really, honest, I don't know why I attacked 'im in the first place. No,

Paintbrushturkey (I like that name, it's got foods in it) said I oughta go and make a ton of armor. I reckoned I'd best to do what he says, so I went down an' I started makin' armor. I make right good armor, I do... E'everyone says so.

But I really miss my covies... Splint made a "skulker barracks" a few months back - cost a lot of mugs to build, it did. That was good mugs he coulda spent gettin' covies... And a skulker barracks? There ain't *nothin'* I'd like better'n for them t' all lay down and die, or jus' run off yonder into the rainin' blood an' never come back. But it ain't my place to say, no... I shouldn't say such things, Mr Frog'll want to question me again.

Anyhow... So... Few weeks back, I was throwin' a party in the dinin' room, y'know? I do so love parties, an' I was happy. Splint ordered me a cavy or two from the mountainhomes, an' now I'm gonna get some covies! Sweet lil cuddly cute lil things that you cain't help but smile when y'see. Gods, I love me a good cavy. But not cooked. That's a crime against everythang, I rightly know. Even for how Spearbreakers is like hell an' all, it's still too evil for someones to do. I jus' wish I could remember what happen to all of my other covies... Georgie Boy and Petunia and Elana... Where's'd'they all go? I don't got no idea...

Dear me, I keeps gettin' distracted an' all... 'Kay, so... I was throwin' a party, an' there were so many purty people there. They all love my parties, an' this was the first one I'd had that weren't in mah room. Used to be they were, but people didn' like the cavy smell. Now there were *ever* so many people there... An' everything was so fine and dandy and beautiful...

And then SPLINT came an' tole me I had to stop "foolin' around" a'cause he wouldn't get his statue done. Why in the nine royal, fuggleplated hells we'd need a giant middle finger ousside, I ain't got no idea; not a one. So I said to 'im, I said, "Splint... I's been with you through the vampire wars, I has, and granted, I ain't the best battledwarf no more, but we was best friends way back when! Why's you gotta spoil a little of my fun? Iss just harmless stuff, same as a sunbeam in a granite puddin'!" But Splint said no. He said I oughter get myself down t'the stone piles an' carry me some more rocks for his finger. If that ain't the dumbest thing I ever done heard, I dunno what is, and I's about t'tell him so... Sure, he cleaned up the corpses ousside. Bombzero's turnin' in her grave at that one, I kin tell ya' fer sure. "*Don't **nobody** touches my corpses!*" I can hear her sayin' it a'most clear as apples, when I listen for it.

Mr Frog came, tho'. Aw, Mr Frog... Such a right smart dwarf, he is. An' so nice t'me, too... Still ain't sure why I attacked 'im, like people says... They used to look at me funny for a while there, they did. Anyhow, Mr Frog came an tole ol' Splint to lay off. He tole me he wanted me to make 'im something special... Part of a suit of armor. He was real specific, he was... But anyhow... I've been workin' on the armor like he said, an' I figger it ain't gonna be long til my covies get here. Mr. Splint's up there right now, hagglin' with the traders an' the liaison man. I'll have me covies down here soon as pie... wait...

Oh, gods, I didn' e'en think of it... I hope theys don't fall in the magma while I'm workin'! Fuggle, I'm gonna have t'keep 'em locked up in my room... An' actually lock the door, like Mr Frog does with his now... gods, I gotta go check t'make sure my lock even works - I ain't ne'er had no reason to use it afore. Fuggle!

The entry ends here.

(TALVIENO):



SPLINT:

27th Sandstone, 207. Intermittent Entry.

Mr Frog informs me we now have three "Uninvited Guests" roaming around the caverns.

Kob - A towering glob of water. Mr Frog says he managed to slip into the caverns and got a sample of it's spittle, which has some unknown effect but is at least slightly corrosive to copper. I could send fischer down to kill that one alone.

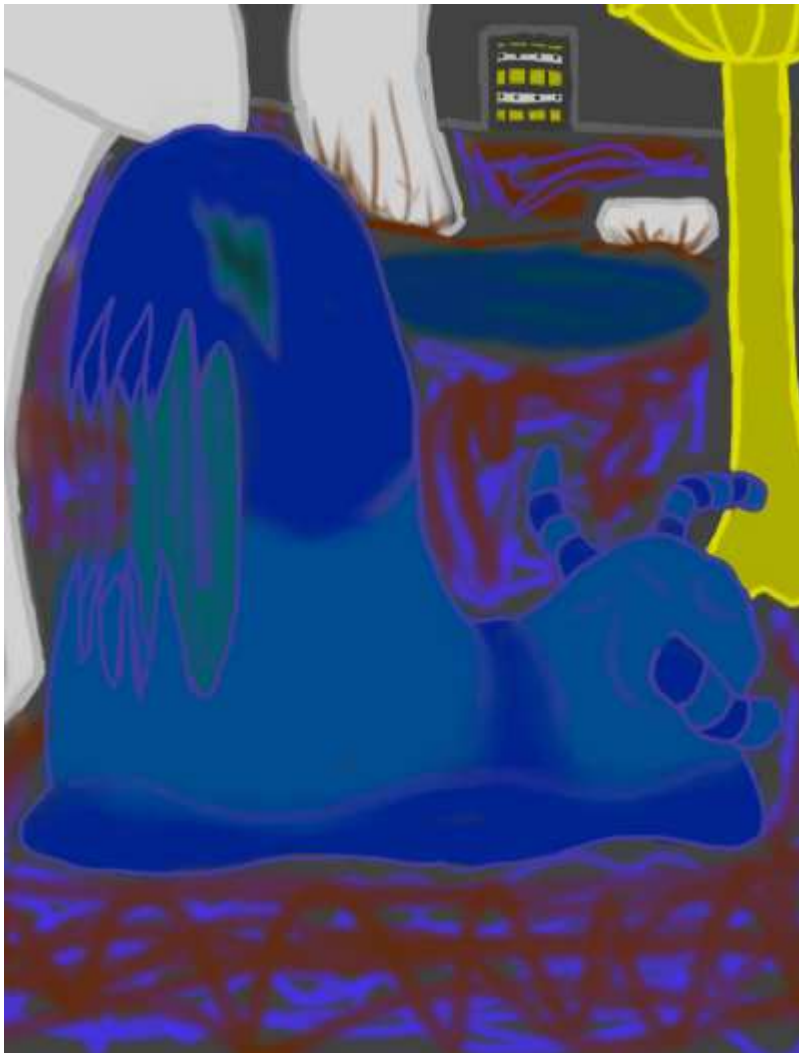
Ugeth - He called this one a human torch, just with less human and more torch. I wonder if we could rig up a water trap to eliminate that thing?

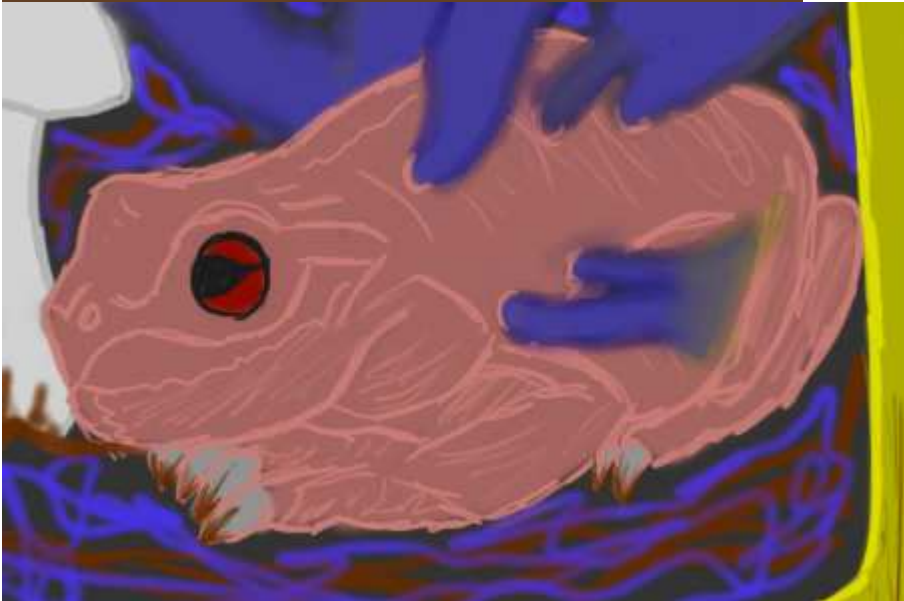
Thiliri Romigaretho - A huge dust exuding frog with no skin and hornet-like mandibles. We could mobilize the civil defense units to kill it at range, but Mr Frog says he wants it alive. How we'd go about that I have no idea. I've heard tell that Great Spinner webs can entangle them...

[Author's OoC note: I personally am all for cheating to capture certain FBs that are too dangerous to send Fischer after but Mr Frog would want for research. Just DFhack some webbing onto a trap for them. And I do think someone should kill that flaming FB, cause it lighting the caverns on fire is probably hurting FPS. Cave in traps run the risk of accidentally killing them (which is guaranteed if it yanks the support itself.)]

28th Sandstone, 207. Intermittent Entry._

I've decided to include some drawings since I'm bored out of my mind of the "Guests."





9th Timber, 207. Intermittent Entry.

The fist is nearing completion. It took a little over a week to get enough iron to finish the palm. However the sheer number of furnace operators allowed our iron stocks to recover exponentially.

Also saw a flock of ravens, and Loud Whispers spent some time on the top of the thumb of the fist just staring at them for some reason. He left a note saying "revenge" scrawled on it everywhere with a picture of a raven on it.

12th Timber, 207.

Caravan from home arrived today. I actually think the humans are still loading up their haul...

```
The outpost liaison Ineth Regorshar from Stemelzarustuth has arrived.  
→A caravan from Stemelzarustuth has arrived.
```

14th Timber, 207.

Since I wasn't busy (Rose was in bed at the time.) I've already begun placing our orders for materials from home.

```
Ineth Regorshar: I am your liaison from the Mountainhones. Let's discuss your situation.
```

Oh, and did I mention anywhere the humans ARE STILL TRYING TO LOAD UP ALL THE SHIT WE SOLD THEM!?



[Yes. the humans are still trying to load all the useless shit we sold them up.]

We're also elevating by leaps and bounds! We're now a county of the nation!

```
You continue to impress! I have come empowered to elevate this land in the  
eyes of our realm.
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a - Finish peeking in on conversation.
```

The liaison also mentioned being impressed by our little monument.

17th Timber, 207.

It's done.... It's FINALLY DONE AHAHAHAHAHA!!! YOU HEAR THAT VOICES!? YOU CAN'T JUDGE ME NOW, I HAVE A GIANT FUCK YOU SIGN ON MY LAWN AHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

SPLINT:



[Fischer] herself. Yes the helmet's impractical, but that's just so the enemy has a slight chance of living past 30 seconds. Also she bolted the shield to her bracer.

TALVIENO:

[[Talvieno's note: Seqivet are something else proposed to be added into Spearbreakers II. Another creation of Mr Frog's.]]

And now, for seqivet.

It's the second year of your fort. Everything's going smoothly - you've managed to build a new hospital, it's not like Spearbreakers'. You've got a drawbridge and a huge moat filled with water from a nearby river. You've got a long path leading to the fortress filled with pointy spikes and cave traps, and you're finally getting the semblance of a working military.

Suddenly, something goes wrong. The game pauses and the screen moves to the dining room, deep within the fortress. **"An ambush! Curse them!"** It's a band of seqivet - seven of them, to be exact. They kill a dwarf or two before you can even do anything about it.

You send in a single squad - fortunately the barracks is right next door. When the squad arrives, *the seqivet disappear*. You fear they haven't actually been vaporized, as you don't have a Colonel Fischer, and your mind is on high alert, so you have your squad search the dining room from corner to corner. Moments later... **"An ambush! Curse them!"** The screen has moved to the opposite side of the fortress, at the statue garden - it's the same band of seqivet.

Now you're actually scared. You wish you hadn't left the drawbridge down, and that you'd remembered to build an F.R.O.G... And possibly that you hadn't made the hallways quite so wide. You rush your soldiers - all of them - to the statue garden. One of your civilians has gotten off a lucky hit - one of the seqivet are wounded and trailing pink blood, in contrast to Scythod Green or Troll Blue. But as soon as the soldiers arrive, the seqivet disappear again. You try to lock both doors to the garden to trap them, but they've already claimed the far door. Not knowing what else to do, you move your entire military to the center of the fortress, hoping you'll be able to reach wherever they pop up next in time.

But they never show up again. Have they left? Are they lurking somewhere in the fortress? Are they waiting for you to let your guard down? Should you raise the drawbridge lest more come, or keep it down in case they decide to leave? You don't know, but you're biting your nails in terrified, paranoid anticipation of your next encounter.

SPLINT:

18th Timber, 207. Intermittent Entry.

As of the 18th of Timber, we have four dwarves, maybe five, have developed infections at some point. OverlordTNT, both of Sus' relatives, Gemblade, and possibly Gorefast. I say possibly as Gorefast was suffering from a fever and was ordered by Fischer to either "Stop your bitching or get the hell out of this barracks." He stopped bitching. I must admit, between her head taking and general nastiness to anyone, she scares me. But I've known her since before the war (She left the army to be a mercenary afterwards, hence how I even found her) And I can still see that timid little dwarfette she used to be in there. Hell she's still afraid of the dark outside. It's partially why I insisted on torches every ten feet. The last thing we need is Fischer killing us all because she thought we were bogeymen or something.

Anyway, I have low hopes for those with infections surviving. If I could find a soaper's station I'd gladly try to get soap production going. Perhaps I should get some lye made ahead of time...

19th Timber, 207

An ambush! Curse them!

The drumbeats were sounded again. This time for goblins. As expected, so I sent word to have Fischer pick two dwarves to bring with her to deal with the enemy. I should have expected as such since it's caravan season and a scout got bludgeoned by the caravanners the other day.

I'm told she didn't even hesitate and told Jack Magnus, one of two axelords in her squad, to follow her and she dragged Draignean out by the collar of his mail shirt.

She said she had to drag him out because he was shining his shield and talking to it again.



[Three unlucky dorfs were outside, though Fischer is right there too. hammergobs led by a swordsgob.]

Reports say Mr Frog was insistent on providing fire support for the soldiers, with Fischer demanding the goblin face her like a man. The goblin gladly obliged, but didn't even get to fight. I have since had the beats sent out for them to engage all enemy combatants and to let as few escape as possible. I am going to head up to the tower so I can watch the spectacle.

```
The Goblin Swordsman blocks The flying <iron bolt>!  
The Goblin Swordsman blocks The flying <iron bolt>!  
The flying <iron bolt> strikes The Goblin Swordsman in the head, tearing  
the muscle, fracturing the skull and tearing the brain through the  
<<black bear leather hood>>!  
A tendon in the skull has been torn!  
→The Goblin Swordsman has been knocked unconscious!
```

```
The Kills of 'Mr Frog' Spishabtham  
  
One Notable Kill  
Stosbûb Trailterrors the goblin, d. 207  
  
Six Other Kills  
  
Four zombie goblins (ð) in Spearbreakers  
Two zombie goblins (♀) in Spearbreakers
```

[Mr Frog killed the goblin squad leader. excluding the two blocks, he freaking one-shotted him.]

The Commander-Champion charges at The Goblin Hammerman!
 The Goblin Hammerman looks surprised by the ferocity of The Commander-Champion's onslaught!
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the left foot with her Rulushdezrem, fracturing the bone and shattering the left ankle's bone through the <<giant cave spider silk shoe>>!
 A sensory nerve has been severed, a ligament has been torn and a tendon has been torn!
 A ligament in the left ankle has been torn and a tendon has been torn!
 The Commander-Champion collides with The Goblin Hammerman!
 The Goblin Hammerman is knocked over!
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the left lower leg with her Rulushdezrem, tearing the muscle through the <<grizzly bear leather trousers>>!
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the right upper arm with her Rulushdezrem, fracturing the bone and fracturing the right shoulder's bone through the <<troll fur cloak>>!
 A motor nerve has been severed and a tendon has been torn!
 A ligament in the right shoulder has been torn and a tendon has been torn!
 The Goblin Hammerman loses hold of the <<copper shield>>.
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the left upper arm with her Rulushdezrem, fracturing the bone through the <<troll fur cloak>>!
 A tendon has been torn!
 The Goblin Hammerman loses hold of the <<copper war hammer>>.
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the left lower leg with her Rulushdezrem, fracturing the bone through the <<grizzly bear leather trousers>>!
 An artery has been opened by the attack, a sensory nerve has been severed, a ligament has been torn and a tendon has been torn!
 The Goblin Hammerman loses hold of the <<giant cave spider silk shoe>>.
 The Goblin Hammerman loses hold of the <<cave spider silk sock>>.
 The Commander-Champion stabs The Goblin Hammerman in the left foot with her Rulushdezrem and the severed part sails off in an arc!

Fischer got the first one besides the leader. Jack and Draigean confirmed that the poor bitch didn't even get to swing her hammer. *[Seriously. She moves three times fast than any of the other soldiers. WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE ON. She did all that before either of the other two army dorfs even caught up with her!]* Fischer claimed the kill as a bleedout, though Mr Frog and Draigean decided they needed to get involved in the already good-as-dead goblin's demise. Draigean was attacked from behind by the next goblin, and Fischer tackled the poor fool and took a bite out of his upper body.

Jack went after the next, who tried to pry Fischer off her comrade only to have Jack chop her foot off. He then dragged her away by the belt and tried to smash he skull with the pommel of his axe, but it was sadly poorly aimed and looked to have glanced off the crest of the helmet. The goblin managed to smack Jack upside the head and he stumbled into Fischer and Draigean, leaving two severely injured goblins trying to drag themselves away from the battle while two others tried to hold out fighting dwarves off.

It didn't work out so well. However...

An ambush? Curse them!

More goblins attacked, led by yet another swordgoblin sergeant came a squad of goblin.... Pikemen. Hoooo boy those poor sods didn't even know what they were walking into.

Jack's first victim succumb to blood loss as the first pikegoblin and the sword-sergeant closed the gap, only for the sergeant to be liberate of it's left leg. I must

say, it's quite enjoyable to watch these fights.... perhaps I should find a good place to build an arena so we can have so good entertainment? Anyway, one of the goblins had second thoughts and tried to retreat, leaving a trail of blood gushing from it's arm, courtesy of Draigneane. Actually it seems the rest of the goblins have all gotten the same idea, save the ones still being mauled by Fischer, Jack and Draigneane. Speaking of which, the one Jack was killing finally died of blood loss.

Since we can't be having any uppity goblins scaring away Fischer's livelihood, I shouted down for them to run the survivors down. Jack chased down the nearest pikegoblin he could see and promptly chopped him to ribbons, but then-

An ambush! Curse them!

Hammergoblins led by an axegoblin, undeterred by the sight of their comrades' flight, decided to try and jump the lone Jack Magnus! I gave word to the drummer to send out for the rest of first squad, simply because I didn't think, as mighty as Jack is, he can fight that many goblins alone. However, as first squad began pouring into the battle line, Jack began trimming the goblin hedges, severing four limbs faster than I could see. I could tell by his swift movements he had been blessed by the war god in his hour of need. He bisected one goblin, bashed the teeth out of the next, thumped one in the chest, and severed three left limbs all in one smooth motion, While Fischer and Draigneane ran down a goblin fleeing to the north, and Krypta set about killing one of the last of the earlier hammergoblins.

All while this happened, a dwarf I don't even know went to work foisting out an endless supply of crap on the home caravan. Hell some of the better made and decorated mugs bought a ton of bin-wood, metal ores, and steel making flux. Just the sheer volume of stuff we'll be dumping on them alone will probably make them take as long to leave as the humans are taking. They bought all the food and drink save the piles of plump helmets, which we have mountains of, though not anywhere near rivaling the heaps of mugs and useless loot.

Honestly Jack did well, smashing aside his aggressors who may have been shocked to see more dwarves come charging out of the gate to meet them. After all was said and done, Krypta killed the axegoblin sergeant, and Jack killed the remaining survivors of his squad. While some of the pike goblins escaped (two to be exact,) I'd say this battle was a win. The caravans will help spread our warriors' glory far and wide and the goblins shall hopefully come knocking with more substantial forces.

[God damn that was messy. Goblin giblets everywhere and more shit we'll need to foist on another caravan, unless the next overseer just wants to go through and manually assign all the useless foreign-made loot to be incinerated. As you can see, I prefer to look at any engagements that happen happening in one day's fighting, as when people say a battle lasted days I think it sound stupid. Realistically nothing living could fight for days nonstop except titans and biological FBs.]

Also, if anyone hasn't noticed I'm trying to best Mitch in number of updates, hence these shortish ones. 🍌]

